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The Iraqi opposition movement in the post Gulf War era 1990-1996

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**THE IRAQI OPPOSITION MOVEMENT:
THE POST-GULF WAR ERA 1990-1996**

**BY
ALI AL-SHAMRANI**

**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF WAR STUDIES
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A Note on Transcription

In transcribing Arabic and Kurdish proper names of people, institutions, and of geographical features, commonly accepted forms of English are used, especially for place names. For personal names, I have tried to strike a balance between forms familiar to the Western reader and accuracy. Commonly used Western renderings of names of certain well-known individuals have been retained throughout the thesis. Chalabi and Barzani are therefore preferred to the literal transcription of these Iraqi names, which never appear in Arabic unless preceded by the ubiquitous definite article 'Al-'. Names of individuals appearing only in third-party sources have either been transliterated (if from an Arabic source) or kept as they appear in the source material (if from a Western source).

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List of Abbreviations

ABSP	Arab Ba'th Socialist Part
ADP	Assyrian Democratic Party
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
FIC	Free Iraqi Council
IAO	Islamic Action Organisation
ICP	Iraqi Communist Party
IDA	Iraqi Democratic Assembly
IDU	Iraqi Democratic Union
IIP	Iraqi Islamic Party
IMK	Islamic Movement in Kurdistan
INC	Iraqi National Congress
Ind.	Independent
JIM	Jund Al-Imam Movement
JAC	Joint Action Committee
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party
NTP	National Turkoman Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SCIRI	Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq

Introduction

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 represents a watershed in the history of modern Iraq, and certainly a turning point in the relationship between President Saddam's regime and its internal and external enemies. The instant rejection of Saddam's move on Kuwait, expressed by the international community and most of the Arab world provided a strong incentive to different groups and individuals opposed to the regime, inside and outside Iraq. Dozens of opposition groups, which had not been heard of before the invasion, increased in number as if by proliferation. The intensely anti-Saddam environment prompted them to be active and seize what was perceived as a "golden opportunity" to exploit Saddam's miscalculation and end his rule. For most opposition groups, if not all, were under the impression that this could be achieved through stepping up pressure by way of reactivating old opposition groups and forming new ones.

The task of removing Saddam Hussein from power, however, proved quite difficult. For the regime of Saddam Hussein, which is totally obsessed with security, proved more aggressive, more disciplined and structured than the opposition had thought. Besides the regime's stubborn resilience, there were other reasons for the failure of the opposition to effect political change in Iraq. The inherited mistrust and conflict between various political parties and currents, the ethnic and sectarian divide as well as the involvement of regional and international powers in the affairs of the opposition movement, were among the major factors which led to the failure of the opposition to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein. This thesis will focus primarily on the "new" opposition groups which mushroomed after the second Gulf War and whose declared common aim is to topple the regime of President Saddam Hussein.

The present investigation attempts to examine the activities of Iraqi opposition in the period following the invasion of Kuwait. It also seeks to analyse the reasons for the opposition's failure to achieve its main objective: toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein. The basic question to which the thesis attempts to find an answer is why did the Iraqi opposition groups fail in its mission despite regional and international support?

Explanatory Frameworks

In order to assess the performance of the post-Gulf War Iraqi opposition, a brief look at the nature of Iraqi society will be provided. Some emphasis will be placed on the historical context and the condition of the society in which Iraqi political opposition developed. Among the major points to be investigated is the religious, ethnic and sectarian diversity of the Iraqi society, especially the Sunni-Shi'a rivalry, which had a noticeable impact on the performance of the opposition movement. The Sunni-Shi'a fault-line, on the one hand and the Arab-Kurdish conflict on the other, which consistently plagued the Iraqi state since its creation, have never faded or indeed diminished despite the immense resources which successive regimes spent on education and the overall improvement in the standard of living of ordinary Iraqis,

Although Iraq was one of the first Arab states to be admitted to the League of Nations, following its full independence in 1932, no democratic tradition ever evolved to match the many advances achieved in the economic, cultural and scientific fields. The absence of democratic traditions has had an immense impact on the opposition which was always considered suspect and severely punished. Besides the traditional police and other security apparatus, Saddam Hussein's *Mukhabarat* (Intelligence) Department thought nothing of physically eliminating its real and imagined enemies.. Alongside the brutality of these oppressive tools, Saddam

Hussein's regime occasionally enticed opposition figures and dissidents to abandon their hostile stance and endorse its legitimacy, through declarations of general amnesty or bribes. In so doing, Saddam Hussein's regime succeeded in thwarting numerous attempts by the opposition to establish political, military or even terrorist bases inside Iraq.

There other important factors which influenced the opposition's strife to achieve its declared objective of toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein. These include the absence of a charismatic figure, capable of rallying the opposition groups behind him. Intervention on the part of regional and international powers in the affairs of the opposition movement exacted a heavy political toll, exposing many groups to accusations of submission and betrayal of the cause. It will also be seen that what further confounded the state of affairs of the Iraqi opposition was its inherited suspicion with which each group viewed the other.

Background to the Opposition

Contrary to what many believe, opposition to the Ba'thist rule in Iraq is not a new phenomenon, which suddenly emerged following Saddam Hussein's invasion of the neighbouring state of Kuwait on 2nd August 1990. The undeniable fact is that over a period lasting some three decades (1968-1990), a number of factors, related mainly to the policies adopted by the regime, had an immense impact on the nature and shape of post-Gulf War political opposition. Soon after their alleged "White Revolution" of July 1968 succeeded in toppling the Aref regime, the Ba'thists, for opportunistic purposes, projected themselves not as monopolisers of power but as political partners, leading the struggle against Zionism and world imperialism. In so doing, they were not only playing a cautious game against their political rivals, whom they did not

want to alienate, but were also trying to buy time, widen their popular base and whitewash their image which had been widely tarnished by the excesses which inaugurated and followed their February 1963 coup. Within a few years, *Al-Hizb Al-Qa'id* (the leading party) succeeded in entrenching itself as the sole party. The transition from "one-party rule" to one of the "sole leader" was soon to follow.

In order to neutralize its rivals and establish full and absolute hegemony, the regime employed the most violent means to eradicate any opposition to its policies and programmes. Physical elimination was often resorted to in order to silence critics and potential dissidents. Besides the traditional police and other security apparatus, the newly created *Mukhabarat* (Intelligence) Department carried out the task of rooting out real and imagined enemies. The word *Mukhabarat*, which had never been part of Iraqi political lexicon, soon came to be a household name in Iraqi society. Alongside the gruesome activities of these oppressive tools, the regime occasionally enticed opposition figures and dissidents to abandon their hostile stance and endorse its legitimacy. While these violent methods succeeded in uprooting practically all forms of active opposition, they nevertheless instilled in the Iraqi conscience deep resentment against the central government and bred widespread tacit opposition. The failed economic policies of the regime and the immense suffering caused by the widely unpopular eight-year war against Iran, which sent hundreds of thousands of Iraqi youth to what came to be known as Saddam's killing fields, turned most Iraqis into potential opponents, not only among the Shi'as and Kurds, but also among large segments of the Sunnis, the supposed backers of, and sympathisers with the regime, whose loyalty was by tradition taken for granted.

Generally speaking, Iraqi opposition attracted little interest, both on the part of the wider public in the Arab world and in the West. The same can be said to be true among academics, Middle East scholars and students of Iraqi political fortunes. There are of course a number of serious works on the subject. Most of them however are devoted to the study of opposition before the invasion of Kuwait.¹ More recently, however, Efraim Karsh, Amatzia Baram, Peter Sluglett and Marion Farouk Sluglett, Charles Tripp and Thomas Koszinowski, among others, took up Iraqi issues and touched upon some aspects of Iraqi opposition.² The focus in most of these works was Iraqi opposition activities prior to the 1990 invasion of Kuwait. With the exception of the Kurdish question³, which has attracted some attention, no full-length study of post-Gulf War Iraqi opposition has appeared. This might perhaps be attributable to the commonly held belief that except for Kurdish armed rebellion, all other opposition groups are so ineffective that they constitute no real threat to the regime and that their activities did not therefore warrant serious study.

Before 1990, the long arm of Saddam Hussein's security service, and the brutality of his regime in dealing with its political opponents, had succeeded in eliminating

¹ These include Hana Batatu's *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* which was first published in 1978 and *The Republic of Fear: Saddam's Iraq* by Samir Al-Khalil [Kanan Makiya] which appeared in 1989, Phebe Marr, *History of Modern Iraq* (1984) and Majid Khadouri's Iraq series.

² Among other works detailed in the Bibliography, these include:

Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Lawrence Freedman & Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict 1990-1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993).

Barry Rubin and Amatzia Baram, *Iraq's Road To War* (London: Macmillan, 1993).

Amatzia Baram, *Building Towards Crisis: Saddam Hussein's Strategy for Survival* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near east Policy, 1998).

Derek Hopwood, Habib Ishow and Thomas Koszinowski (eds), *Iraq: Power and Society* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1993).

³ Michael Gunter's two books: *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political analysis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999) and *The Kurds of Iraq: Tragedy and Hope* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997) are examples of this interest in Kurdish affairs.

almost entirely any form of effective or active opposition inside the country and even outside it.⁴ But the situation has changed since the second Gulf War, the aftermath of which generated widespread opposition not only among the Shi'as, who rose in arms immediately after the cease-fire of February 28th 1991, but also in such Ba'thist strongholds as the Western and northern Arab regions, among the military officers and indeed amidst many Tikritis from Saddam Hussein's home town, including prominent members of his own family.

The Opposition Movement: A Definition

Throughout this study, the term 'opposition' will refer to any political group or collection of groups that disagree with the policies or programmes of the regime of Saddam Hussein, oppose his leadership or the Ba'th Party's control of power. The prime objective of these groups are of course either to reform the policies of the government and the state political system, or to effect change of the political system – to take power and replace the government, whether by peaceful or violent means. With the exception of the Kurdish Front, which has always had its own agenda, these are the declared objectives of most Iraqi opposition groups, old and new.

Like other totalitarian regimes in the Middle East and indeed throughout many parts of the world, Saddam Hussein's dictatorship and, to a large extent, that of Republican and even monarchist Iraq is based on the principle of rejecting democracy as a system of government.⁵ In this respect, however, the difference between Saddam Hussein and

⁴ Andrew Cockburn and Patrick Cockburn, *Out of the ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), point out that the Amman-based opposition group *Al-Wifaq* was, according to several former CIA officers, "riddled with Iraqi double agents-- at least half", p. 226.

⁵ Nazih N. Ayubi, *Overstating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B.

his predecessors was one of degree rather than nature. Despite the existence of a ruling party, government machinery and a host of institutions with resounding names, the regime of Saddam Hussein is built on the fact that these institutions are powerless and devoid of any real meaning or life. Decision-making is concentrated solely and unquestionably in the hands of *Al-Qa'id Al-Adhim* (The Great Leader). His regime may therefore be said to reflect many of the characteristics of Stalin's reign of terror (1924-1953).

Over the last three decades, the Baghdad regime has gone through three distinctive stages:

1. 1968-1975: During this period , which may be referred to as the "Leading Party" stage, the Ba'thists gave a sham appearance of coexistence with some political parties and opposition groups. This seemingly cooperative approach was dictated by domestic as well as external factors relating to the regime's systematic and gradual consolidation of control over all governmental economic and social institutions.
2. 1975-1980: This period may be described as the "One-Party Rule" stage during which the dictatorship of the Ba'th Party was firmly established. All political, social and cultural activities came under the firm grasp of the Ba'thists. Trade unions, professional societies, academic institutions and social clubs were turned into Ba'thist fronts. This period also witnessed the total politicalization of the security and armed forces which, along with the teaching profession, had become closed to non-Ba'thists.

3. From 1980 onwards, Iraq entered into the "Sole Leader" stage, during which the Ba'th Party ceased to function as political instrument involved in the process of decision-making. All power bases, within the Ba'th Party and outside it, were liquidated. Collective leadership was ended and the phenomenon of inner power struggle was successfully terminated in favour of those who professed blind obedience to Saddam Hussein, who was now surrounded by a "docile flock of close associates."⁶

In his attempt to remain totally unchallenged, Saddam Hussein subordinated all foreign and domestic policies to his own political survival. It is ironic that, just as Kuwait's oil resources had indirectly brought about untold sufferings to the Kuwaitis during the Iraqi occupation, the vast mineral resources of Iraq can also be said to have failed the Iraqis in that they made it possible for Saddam Hussein to turn the country into a "rentier state", providing him with immense power to entrench his rule and subjugate the people:

The availability in Iraq of immense revenues generated outside the domestic economy substantially lessened the reliance of governments on their own population... and released many of the regimes of the Middle East from the accountability ordinarily exacted by domestic appropriation of surplus.⁷

Saddam Hussein's regime embodies practically all the characteristics of the authoritarian system of government, especially in his careful attempt to deal with a chronic crisis of legitimacy, either by invoking a "carefully crafted, selective and

⁶ Efraim Karsh & Inari Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein: A Political Biography* (London: Brassey's, 1991), p. 176.

⁷ Lisa Anderson, "Policy-Making and Theory Building: American Political Science and the Islamic Middle East", in Hisham Sharabi, ed., *Theory, Politics and the Arab World: Critical Responses* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 70.

often inaccurate past", such as the glory that was Babylon, the greatness of, among others, Nebuchadnezzar, Hamurabi, Saladin and Sa'ad Bin Abi Waqqas, or by offering promises, perhaps wilfully false, of future material gain - an appeal to progress and developmentalism - in order to fragment the opposition.⁸ Like other authoritarian rulers, Saddam Hussein resorts to dictatorship in a conservative way i.e. preserving traditional values and traditional social structures. This approach, according to Stephen Lee, contrasts with totalitarianism, which normally follow a more radical programme of change and deliberately mobilises the masses to serve a "revolutionary monopolist movement" permeated by a certain ideology.⁹

But Saddam Hussein's regime may also be said to contain many aspects of 'totalitarianism' as practised in Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany and possibly Mussolini's Italy in that everything in the state is subordinated to the so-called Ba'ath ideology and that the Iraqi political system is under the full control of a single leader who has established a cult of personality. Another aspect of totalitarianism in Iraq is the complete subordination of the individual to the dictates of the state through a dual process of coercion and indoctrination. On this point, Lee remarks that while coercion could involve a system of terror, whether physical or psychic that is effected through party apparatus and secret police control, the indoctrination process seeks the destruction of cultural pluralism and the shaping of all human activities like education, literature, etc. to the objectives of political ideology.¹⁰

⁸ Jill Crystal, "Authoritarianism and its Adversaries in the Arab World" *World Politics* 46 (January 1994), p. 264.

⁹ Stephen J. Lee, *The European Dictatorships 1918-1945* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 299.

¹⁰ Lee, *Dictatorships*, p. 300.

On the other hand, the regime of Saddam Hussein may also be said to mirror many aspects of the European medieval feudal system, where loyalty to the lord was of paramount significance. At the heart of Saddam Hussein's regime

lay the small groups of men attached to the president by reason of common regional background, family or tribal affiliation or tried and tested dedication to his personal service. Beyond them spread the networks of patronage and association that gave them weight in Iraqi society and established their worth to Saddam Hussein himself, whilst reinforcing their dependence on his favour.¹¹

When building his power base Saddam Hussein, unlike Syrian counterpart, Hafiz Assad, "chose to recruit new members at a slow, controlled pace with maximum emphasis on loyalty".¹² Thus the "leader" can, like all absolute monarchs, control all the affairs of the state from a presidential office through direct patronage, or through the services of paramilitary and secret police forces. His regime, according to Paul Brooker, carries many of the outdated "absolute" monarchical features which became increasingly apparent, particularly in his rapacious megalomania, from the moment he officially assumed the presidency in July 1979.

Saddam Hussein's personality cult seemed to differ from the standard international form only in degree or extravagance:

It involved omnipresent portraits, constant public and television appearances, comparison with great historical figures, supposed personal piety (culminating in the pilgrimage to Mecca), and grandiloquent titles – 'Sword of the Arabs', 'Knight of the Nation', 'Leader of the Victory' and the like. However, two unusually monarchical aspects were the attempt to identify Saddam with all sectors of Iraqi society, and the 1986 decree which made the crime of

¹¹Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 264.

¹²Roger Owen, *State Power & Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 263.

insulting the President punishable by life imprisonment or the death penalty. The monarchical aspect was also very evident in the new heights to which the personality cult was taken in the late 1980s. There was 'a flurry of speculations that Hussein was paving the way for the restoration of monarchical rule with himself as king and was grooming his eldest son, Uday, as his heir apparent'. A more favourable attitude to monarchy was apparent in the official rehabilitation of Iraq's Hashemite monarchy of the 1930s to 1958 (along with continuing glorification of the ancient Mesopotamian monarchs), and Saddam was himself adopting a more monarchical image. The image of the ascetic and modest socialist had been replaced by monarchical pomp and grandeur that culminated in his leading a commemorative victory procession riding a white horse and dressed in the garb of a Hashemite monarch. In January 1990 he was made President for life.¹³

In establishing his rule of fear, Saddam Hussein, like other absolute leaders, predicated his personal rule on the Ba'th Party. His logic was, like that of other dictators, quite simple. Since the party possessed the organizational infrastructure and ideological basis for controlling people's actions and minds, "it would control the masses and the state machinery while he would control the Party".¹⁴ Part of the tactics adopted by Saddam Hussein to tighten his total grip on power was his employment of economic control as an important tool to impose his political hegemony. Since its accession to power in July 1968, the Ba'thist regime embarked upon transforming Iraq's mixed economy, where private enterprise played a major role, into a socialist economic system, where the state practically monopolised all economic activities. In so doing, the state came to fully control all essential activities and services, which entrenched even further the hegemony of the Ba'thist state over the lives of all Iraqis. However, upon establishing a firm hold on most economic activities during the 1970's, the regime used development and industrial projects as

¹³ Paul Brooker, *Defiant Dictatorships: Communist and Middle Eastern Dictatorships in a Democratic Age* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 120-21.

¹⁴ Karsh and Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein*, p. 176.

well as export-import trade licences as a political tool to win over businessmen and insure their loyalty, through tying their own interests with that of the regime.

It is therefore not easy to classify the regime of Saddam Hussein as it, in many respects, contains elements of totalitarianism and authoritarianism. But Saddam Hussein did have his own role model. Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi point out that early in his career, Saddam Hussein read about the dynamics of Nazi Germany which he saw as "an example of the successful organisation of an entire society by the state...".¹⁵ Like Germany on the eve of World War II, the political structure of the Iraqi state has, notably since 1968, been dominated by the ideologies of the Ba'th Party. Furthermore, the whole government machinery has, since July 1979 (when Saddam officially assumed the presidency) been subordinated to the exclusive control of the sole leader who established a strong base for his personality cult and developed it to an extreme extent in order to influence the life of every citizen.

Despite the dictatorial nature of Saddam Hussein's regime, there are those who believe that before the Kuwait crisis, Saddam Hussein and his regime had a power base among certain social strata. The numerous development projects implemented by the government during the 1970s and the noticeable rise in the standard of living played an important role in casting the dictatorial regime in a favourable light. Furthermore, to entrench himself strongly in power, Saddam Hussein, perhaps more than any other Iraqi ruler before, resorted to the age-old tactic of buying off allegiance through "bribing" tribal leaders, military officers and party apparatchiks. This privileged access to the state resources came in variety of forms: contracts,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

export-import licenses, industrial projects and distribution of state-owned land. In return, Saddam Hussein received active support, as those who enjoyed the regime's favour tied their future to that of the regime, as they felt that they would lose everything if the regime were to be overthrown.¹⁶

Post-1990 Opposition

In discussing Iraqi opposition to Saddam Hussein's dictatorial regime, the study will focus on the period 1990-1996, which represents a distinct 'phase' in the development of the Iraqi opposition movement and falls between two major events: the invasion of Kuwait (2nd August, 1990) and the advance of central government forces on the city of Arbil, the administrative centre of Iraqi Kurdistan (31st August 1996) which led to ejection of the opposition groups based there.

The term 'new opposition' refers to the numerous Arab opposition groups which sprang up in the aftermath of the second Gulf War. These groups have been fervently calling for, and working towards, the downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime, which considers them traitorous and illegal and with which he refuses to engage in any form of contact. As opposition to President Saddam Hussein's regime was in existence long before the invasion of Kuwait, the term 'new' Iraqi opposition will also be used refer to the anti-regime activities of various groups which had been in existence before the invasion but which adopted new strategies and revived or reactivated their tactics and operations after the invasion.

¹⁶Tripp, *History of Iraq*, pp. 264-5.

Pre-1990 Iraq

The historical development of the modern state of Iraq may be divided into four major and distinct phases. The first, which falls between 1921-1958, is the period when Iraq emerged as an independent state under the rule of the Hashimite family until the end of the monarchist regime at the hands of Free Officers Organisation in July 1958. The second phase, 1958-1963, is the period of the first republic under the leadership of General Abdul Karim Qassim. The third phase, 1963-1968, represents the period of coups and counter coups under the rule of the two Aref brothers. The fourth and last is the phase that has begun with the Ba'th party's return to power in 1968 and continues to the present day.

During these four phases of its development, the country lived under fundamentally different political and economic conditions. Thus different and changeable conditions naturally produced different types of opposition movements and, in turn, different government strategies to counter opposition activities. But at the root of Iraq's political problems lie the two great divides: the first between the Shi'as and Sunnis, the second between Arabs and Kurds. During the royal regime, the idea of Arab nationalism *qawmiya* was often exploited to unite the Arab population (Sunnis and Shi'as) and the idea of *wataniya* (Iraqi nationalism - pertaining to the country or homeland) to unite the Arabs, Kurds and other minorities. These attempts, as later developments showed, were not particularly successful. The Shi'a -Sunni discord, on the one hand, and the Arab-Kurdish schism, on the other, has proved too deep to be plastered over by such terminology.

Iraqi society contains, albeit with no clear or distinct demarcation lines, three identifiable classes: the upper, the middle, and the lower. The upper classes wielded

considerable political and social influence during the monarchist period. From the 1958 Revolution onwards, they have consistently been undermined until they were almost uprooted at the hands of the Ba'thists. But the middle-class, as Batatu points out, has always been the most powerful.¹⁷ Political life in the country - the political leadership in power or in opposition - has been dominated by the middle-class, which represents the intellectuals, the professionals, and most importantly the army officers. In point of fact, all the regimes that

issued from the 1958 Revolution and from the related subsequent coups, including the present regime, have been middle-class regimes, but not in the narrow sense that they have functioned explicitly on behalf of the middle classes or consciously furthered their interests.¹⁸

This composition however underwent drastic change during the last generation or so as Saddam Hussein, himself a product of depressed rural Tikrit, showed continual signs of distrust and suspicion towards the established urbanite middle class and tilted towards those of rural roots. Real power in Saddam's Iraq lies with those who, like their president, come from rural areas.

The heterogeneity of the Iraqi nation had a great deal of impact on the political life of the state and on the nature of the opposition to the governments. Since the establishment of the modern state of Iraq, political power has been in the hands of a ruling elite representing the leading political element in Iraqi society: the Sunni Arabs. This made the other ethnic and religious communities, especially the Shi'as

¹⁷ Batatu, Hanna, *The Old Social classes and the revolutionary movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and Its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 62, 1115, 1125.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 1125.

and the Kurds, along with other smaller groups of various denominations, engage in a permanent form of opposition to the ruling elite. Thus opposition movements in Iraq have underlined an inter-communal struggle, which is largely based on ethnic and religious principles rather than on ideological bases or political doctrines.

Structure

The present investigation comprises two major parts. The first part consists of three chapters. Chapter I gives a brief account of the political history and development of Iraq, from the emergence of the modern state in 1921 through independence in 1932 and the end of the monarchy up to the rise of President Saddam Hussein to power in 1979. Chapter II provides a political-racial map of modern Iraq. It also discusses and analyses the implications and development of the term 'political opposition' in the Iraqi political lexicon and the evolution of this term throughout the political life of the country. The main emphasis in this chapter will centre on the ethnic, religious, sectarian, and regional divisions within Iraqi society. As many of the problems of the present state of Iraq are rooted in the state's early developments, and in its social and political make-up, the study will also attempt to trace Iraq's political, social, and economic developments. Chapter III focuses on the Iraqi opposition movement and its political activities until 1990. Special emphasis will be placed on the opposition to the Ba'thist regime between 1968 and 1990 including the intra-Ba'th struggle and the regime's attempt to establish a Soviet style one-party rule.

The second and main part of the study will deal with the activities of the Iraqi opposition movement following the Iraqi invasion of the state of Kuwait. This part consists of three chapters. Chapter IV investigates the implications of the regime's decision to invade the state of Kuwait and its impact on the revival of opposition

activities, on the perceived weakness of the regime and on what seemed then as the imminent downfall of the regime of President Saddam. Chapter V focuses on the structure, policies and aims of the numerous new opposition groups and their anti-regime activities. Special attention will be given to the ideologies of the major groups, their relationships with regional and international powers as well as the methods of operation adopted. The circumstances under which the Iraqi National Congress (INC), the main umbrella organisation, was created, will be investigated, as well as the various attempts made at forming a united opposition front. Chapter VI discusses in some detail the role which the Iraqi National Congress (INC) played in the effort to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein from the period following the Salah Al-Din Conference of October 1992 to August 1996, when Saddam Hussein's troops stormed the regional capital of Kurdistan, Arbil. The thesis ends with a conclusion in which the results of the investigation are summed up.

Sources

Until the invasion of Kuwait scholarly interest in Mesopotamia far outweighed that of modern Iraq. The situation changed slightly after August 1990 and some important works, both in Arabic and English, have appeared since then. With regard to post-Gulf War Iraqi opposition, however, Western literature on authoritarianism neglects Iraq and suffers accordingly.¹⁹ In general, the republican period attracted most of the attention inside the walls of Academe and outside. Standard works on republican Iraq since 1958 and general surveys of modern Iraqi history are now available and are

¹⁹ Jill Crystal, "Authoritarianism and its Adversaries in the Arab World" *World Politics*, vol. 46 (January 1994), p. 287.

generally somewhat reliable.²⁰ In Arabic, Ali Al-Wardi's mammoth work, *Lamahat min Tarikh Al-Mujtama' Al-Iraqi* (*Glimpses of the History of Iraqi Society*) (Baghdad, 1965), as well as his other works on Iraqi society remain the most comprehensive reference on the development of Iraqi society from medieval times to the present; Kanan Makiya's *Republic of Fear* (1986) provides an insight into social and political development in Iraq from 1968 until the date of publication, while his second book, *Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising and the Arab World* (London: Penguin Books, 1993) discusses the immediate impact of Saddam Hussein's defeat in the Gulf War and the rise of the Iraqi Intifada. Stephen Longrigg's *Iraq 1900-1950: A Political, Social and Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953) is still a very useful and valuable book as it combines eyewitness accounts and historical research. A good source of information may be found in the memoirs of veteran Iraqi politicians and military officers such as Ismaeel Al-Aref, Abdul Karim Farhan, Subhi Abdul Hamid and others who had played key parts in one stage or other in the history of modern Iraq.²¹

Arabic literature on Iraq under President Saddam has been growing albeit slowly. Most of these works however are one-sided, partisan and of doubtful academic value. As far as opposition to the regime is concerned, the picture is somewhat bleaker. No

²⁰Works such as Hanna Batatu's voluminous *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Bathists, and Free Officers* serve as a major reference on the socio-political developments of the Iraqi state and society from the early 1920s to the downfall of General Qassim's regime in 1963. This scholarly work ends with the return of the Ba'thist regime to power in July 1968. It is a unique academic work in English in the sense that the author bases his research on personal interviews, Iraqi and Arabic sources and official and unofficial Iraqi documents and party pamphlets. Majid Khadduri's three books on the political history of the modern Iraqi state, *Independent Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics, 1932- 1958*, *Republican Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics Since the Revolution of 1958* and *Socialist Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics Since 1968* provide a useful reference to the state's political developments since 1932. Peter Sluglett and Marion Farouk-Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1990) provides an insight into the tyrannical regime of Saddam Hussein.

full-length study of this thorny and multi-faceted issue has yet been attempted. The few publications which purport to deal with this issue are lacking in credibility. On the other hand, Western interest has in the main focused on the personality of President Saddam Hussein.²²

This study will draw on both written and oral sources. The written material will be mainly based on primary Arabic sources, especially the publications of the opposition groups and their press releases, along with their manifestos or constitutions. Indeed the main activities of the Iraqi opposition groups have so far not been in the political or military efforts to bring down President Saddam's regime but in the public relations fields, anti-regime propaganda and promotional publications intended as a defence and/or attack mechanism against rival groups. Besides the opposition groups' own publications, the study will also rely on media reports, analyses and comments.

The oral sources consist of a number of personal interviews and discussions with opposition leaders and activists based in the Arab world and elsewhere. They are a major primary source of information. These interviews focus on the regional and international dimensions of the opposition groups and are concerned as well with the links between these groups and foreign governments, and the extent of foreign support - an issue which is normally left out of the opposition's publications. Most opposition figures interviewed attempted to present a favourable and bright picture of the goals and achievements of their political group. Some interviewees occasionally

²¹ These are detailed in the Bibliography below.

²² The best examples of these are: Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein, A Political Biography* (London: Brassey's, 1991), Simon Henderson, *Instant Empire: Saddam Hussein's Ambition for Iraq* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1991), Tim Trevan, *Saddam's Secrets: The Hunt for Iraq's Hidden Weapons* (London: Harper Collins, 1999) and Andrew Cockburn & Patrick Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990).

made no account of, and even smeared, the work of fellow opposition leaders. The information obtained from oral sources was therefore carefully sifted, analysed and weighed against available evidence before it was incorporated into the present investigation.

Among the difficulties confronted while conducting interviews was the fact that some of the interviewees were less than forthcoming in their responses to what must have seemed as stubborn and persistent queries from me. Having lived under close surveillance by Saddam Hussein's security apparatus, inside and outside Iraq, some of the activists were, understandably enough, even suspicious of the whole project and refused, at least at first, to cooperate. It took some time before I succeeded in establishing my credibility as an academic researcher. The fact that I was a Saudi diplomat did not help either. Although they did not show it, many of the opposition leaders were wondering as to whether I was using the interviews for purposes other than academic. Since these opposition leaders were involved in an unfinished business, and in ongoing and clandestine operations against the regime of Saddam Hussein, many were afraid that their responses might have a negative impact on the political group as a whole, their personal safety as well as on their friends and families still living in Iraq

Summary

Saddam Hussein's dictatorship did not collapse in the aftermath of his military defeat by the U.S.-led international coalition, despite the fact that the scope and extent of this defeat went beyond expectations. Furthermore, it survived an armed popular uprising in the south and the north and thwarted all attempts aimed at undermining the Baghdad regime or at physically eliminating Saddam Hussein.

The argument underlining this thesis is that, despite initial enthusiasm, the Iraqi opposition movement proved to be ineffective and was very limited in its ability to weaken or undermine the regime of President Saddam Hussein. It furthermore seems unable to exert any real influence on the Iraqi people or change their perception. Despite the favourable external environment, which materialised, at least in the first two years after the Gulf War, in the form of strong though not open Arab, regional and Western support, Iraqi opposition continued to be weak and ineffective. It will be seen that the ethnic, religious and ideological schisms, which were not known, before the Ba'thists seized power, to extend deep downward, turned into open conflicts and became a central issue in Iraqi opposition activities. Furthermore, lack of leadership, internal bickering and infighting over such issues as finances, proportional representation as well as the arbitrary and autocratic leadership of its umbrella organisation, the INC were among the most important factors which almost paralysed the opposition. On the other hand, the adversary against whom these motley groups were pitted against, the regime in Baghdad, was and remains ruthless, unscrupulous and in possession of a most secretive police force and intelligence apparatus, whose long arm operates practically everywhere Iraqis are known to exist. What has rendered the task of the opposition even harder is the fact that they were fighting against Saddam Hussein, whose ability to manoeuvre and survive great odds has become proverbial. A prime example is the way he inaugurated his political career with ambushing General Qassim with a machine-gun and then fleeing the scene by

crossing the Syrio-Iraqi Desert on foot disguised as a shepherd.²³

An attempt will further be made to evaluate the role of personality in the movement and their bases of influence and legitimacy. This aspect of the study is necessitated by the fact that a number of individuals who represent no movement or organised ideological group came to play a major role in the opposition activities, relying solely on their social or religious status within the Iraqi community. Thus dignitaries from the eminent Shi'a religious families, as well as a few individuals belonging to the old landowner families appeared as leading figures in the movement.

The unexpected conditions that obtained following President Saddam's surprise decision to invade and annex Kuwait on the one hand, and the international community's reaction and determination to reject and resist the occupation, on the other, provided unique and unprecedented favourable conditions for all anti-Saddam forces to utilise. The Western support and the noticeable degree of Arab and regional sympathy and backing for the "new" post-Kuwait Iraqi opposition movement was a privilege the "old" and the traditional opposition groups never enjoyed.

The stated intention of this work - to focus on the "new" opposition movement whose specific and primary aim is to topple and replace President Saddam's regime - means that the sphere or range of this study has been narrowed down to exclude from its scope the anti-government's activities of the Kurdish national parties (namely the Kurdish Democratic Party- KDP, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan – PUK and the Islamic Movement in Kurdistan IMK). It is now universally accepted that the Kurdish parties' main objective is not toppling or replacing the government in Baghdad but,

²³ Muhammad Mualla, *Al-Ayyam Al-Taweela (The Long Days)* (Baghdad: Dar Al-Shu'oun Al-

rather, to achieve political and national rights for the Kurdish minority.²⁴

The role of the Iraqi Kurdish opposition however will be discussed in relation to their alliances with other non-Kurdish Iraqi opposition groups. Indeed, the Kurdish region of Iraq was for four years (1992-96) one of the main geographical areas where non-Kurdish anti-government's political and military activities were conducted. The Western protection of the Kurdistan region and its 'liberation' from the central government's forces and authority offered many opposition groups an excellent chance to operate in this part of the state with a large measure of freedom.

Thaqafiya Press, 1980), p. 86.

²⁴ Interview with Hoshiar Zibari, KDP London representative, in London on 15th January 2000.

Chapter 1: Iraq: From the End of the First World War to the Gulf War

This chapter attempts to provide an overview of the major political developments which took place in Iraq, from the end of World War I to the Gulf War of 1991. Special emphasis will be placed on the role of the army in Iraqi politics and on the military coups which swept the land, from the early thirties through the mid-seventies. The complex relationship between King Faisal I and the Iraqis on the one hand and between Faisal and the British on the other, will be discussed with some attention given to the part played by the British-installed monarch in building the newly established state. This chapter will also discuss the factors which led to the extermination of the monarchy, the rise and fall of military dictatorships between 1958 and 1968. Saddam Hussein's ascendancy to power, his conspiratorial mind, the ruthless elimination of his rivals and the imposition of a dictatorial regime aimed at monopolising power and silencing all voices of opposition, real or imagined, will be dealt with in some detail.

Iraq Under British Occupation (1917-1921)

The three Ottoman willayas (provinces) Basra first, then Baghdad and later Mosul came under direct British military rule at the end of World War I. With this conquest, Britain, whose interest in Iraq significantly increased after the Ottomans had granted concessions to Germany to build the Berlin-Baghdad Railway, ensured that the lines of communication to India would not be threatened. There are of course many factors which facilitated the invasion of Iraq. Chief among these was the rising nationalist feeling in Arabia which was decidedly anti-Ottoman. Resentment against the High Porte and subsequent Arab Revolt against the Ottomans played a considerable part in the success of the Indian Expeditionary Force which in 1914 was entrusted with the

task of advancing from Basra on the Shat Al-Arab waterway to Baghdad via Kut on the Tigris, where they were to suffer heavy casualties.²⁵

To be sure, increased skirmishes in various parts of Arabia between the Arabs under the Sharefs' suzerainty on the one hand, and the Ottomans on the other, did much to distract the latter, both militarily and administratively. These clashes naturally offered a favourable opportunity for the British to attack the Ottoman soft belly, southern Iraq and the head of the Gulf.²⁶ The protracted invasion of the Land Between the Two Rivers came after Britain had declared war on the Sick Man of Europe in November 1914, stating at the same time that she "had no quarrel with the Arab inhabitants of the river banks as long as they showed themselves friendly". The following day the Fao fort at the southernmost tip of present day Iraq was silenced.²⁷ The invasion of Mesopotamia had begun.

The British northward advance was not as easy as had been envisaged. Heavy losses were sustained between 1914 and 1917. In one battle alone the British lost 10, 000 men and 23, 000 wounded. What eventually helped the British achieve their victory was the poor organisation of the anachronistic Ottoman forces as well as their low morale.²⁸ The first British soldiers entered Baghdad on 11 March 1917.

²⁵ It was the gradual British occupation of what was loosely known as Mesopotamia that unified its three separate provinces. The present boundaries of the modern state of Iraq, though known in history as the 'cradle of civilisation' were in fact drawn in the spring of 1920 in San Remo, on the Italian Riviera. See Khalid Al-Tamimi, *Muhammad Ja'ffar Abul Timman: Dirasa Fil Za'ama Al-Siyassiya Al-Iraqiya (Muhamad Ja'ffar Abul Timman: A Study in Iraqi Political Leadership)* (London: WM Typographics, 1996), pp. 45-7; Tim Niblock, *Iraq: the Contemporary State* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 3; Matthew Elliot, *Independent Iraq: The Monarchy & British Influence, 1941-1958* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996), p. 1.

²⁶ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (London: Longman, 1985), p. 31.

²⁷ Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Iraq 1900 to 1950: A Political, Social And Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 78.

²⁸ Geoff Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam* (London: MacMillan, 1994), p. 190.

Most people at first saw in the British take-over a golden opportunity to shake off the yoke of Ottoman occupation and snatch independence for which they had yearned for a long time. In these three willayas, as in other parts of Ottoman occupied lands, hopes were raised even higher after the British had assured the rebelling Arabs, mainly through the Sharefs, that if they supported Britain the latter would then recognise and guarantee their independence. Although this promise was made to muster Arab support, it must be pointed out that Britain, through its Arab Bureau in Cairo and also through such adventurous officers as Lawrence of Arabia, did in fact offer some arms, money and military training to the rebelling Arabs in Syria, Palestine and elsewhere.²⁹ Much to their dismay and anger however this promise proved empty and the deeply cherished hope of independence remained unfulfilled. With the signing at the Conference of San Remo in April 1920 of the Peace Treaty and the Anglo-French oil agreement which divided the spoils,³⁰ British occupation of Iraq was legitimised under the newly coined euphemistic term 'mandate' in which the individual countries were considered 'independent' but subject to a mandatory power until they reached political maturity. However, Britain proved to be more interested in consolidating its hold over the newly conquered land than in fulfilling the wishes of the Iraqis.³¹

²⁹ Abdul-Majid H. Al-Qaisi, *Al-Tarikh Yukyabu Ghadan: Hawamish ala Tarikh Al-Iraq Al-Hadith (History Will Be Written Tomorrow: Notes on the History of Modern Iraq)* (London: Dar Al-Hikma Publishing and Distribution, 1993), p. 107.

³⁰ Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 186.

³¹ Kadhim Ni'meh, *Al-Malik Faisal Al-Awwal wal Ingiliz wal Istiqlal (King Faisal I, the English and Independence)* (Beirut: Al-Dar Al-Arabiya Lil Mawsou'at, 1988), p. 36.

The severity of the new centralised administration, the process of anglicising or rather 'indianising' government machinery³² and the strict tax collection system only fuelled the frustration and bitterness of the people who had already been disappointed by the discovery that they had been duped by their so-called 'liberators'. Resentment was especially pervasive in the rural areas and among the tribesmen to whom the British occupiers seemed even more repressive than their erstwhile co-religionist masters.³³ In the cities and towns where many Ottoman-educated men and ex-officers from the Ottoman army had been calling for close co-operation with the British administration, attitudes were soon to turn anti-British. *Jam'iyat Al-Ahd Al-Iraqi* (Iraqi Covenant Society), which brought together a number of Turkish-educated Iraqis, some of whom had served in the Ottoman army, and which had earlier sought co-operation with the British felt compelled to change its constitution to include an article expressing its commitment to independence.³⁴ In short, when the first three years of British occupation produced no emancipation, and the mounting complaints to the Arab Bureau in Cairo bore no fruit, popular opposition grew wider and took the form of an armed struggle.³⁵ Encouraged by *fatwas* which placed an obligation upon the people of the land to fight against the invading and outlandish *kaffirs* (infidels), many tribes, peasants as well as city dwellers throughout the three wilayas rose in arms against the new administration.³⁶

³² 'The administration imposed on Iraq was overwhelmingly the work of men seconded from the India Office and was modelled largely on Britain's imperial structure in India'. Marr, *History of Iraq*, p. 31.

³³ Fadhil Al-Barrak, *Dawr Al-Jaish Al-Iraqi fi Hukumat Al-Difa' Al-Watani wa Al-Harb ma'a Baritania (The Role of the Iraqi Army in the National Defence Government and in the War Against Britain)* (Beirut: Al-Dar Al-Arabiya Lil Mawsou'at, 1987), 1987, pp. 50-51.

³⁴ Ni'meh, *Faisal I*, pp. 39-40.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

In Baghdad and other big cities the dignitaries, while not yet organised into political groupings or parties, used the neighbourhood coffee shops, schools, mosques and *Hussainiyahs* (Shi'a religious centres especially created for eulogising of *Ahl Al-Beit* i.e. the family of Prophet Muhammad and his descendants) as meeting places for the propagation of anti-British feeling.³⁷

This however does not mean that no political parties existed during this period. In 1919, *Haras Al-Istiqlal* (Guardians of Independence) was specifically created to achieve independence. The Iraqi dignitary Ja'ffar Abul Timman, who was to play a major role in the political future of Iraq was one of its outstanding members. Other parties struggling for emancipation included *Al-Hizb Al-Watani Al-Iraqi* (Iraqi National Party) and *Al-Nahdha Al-Iraqiya* (Iraqi Awakening) headed by Amin Al-Charachafchi. In the mid-Euphrates a number of secret anti-British societies were formed. These included *Jam'iyat Al-Nahdha Al-Islamiya* (Islamic Awakening Society) and *Al-Jamiya Al-Wataniya Al-Islamiya* (Muslim National Society). Driven by their zeal to expel the British from Iraqi soil, these societies sometimes resorted to violence in order to achieve that goal. Although open to all Iraqis Shi'as, Kurds or Sunnis, the vast majority of the followers of those parties and societies were Shi'as. Those parties which were basically class-based and lacked a comprehensive political vision or programme were however short-lived and were officially dissolved and banned from exercising any activities by the High Commissioner in August 1922.³⁸

³⁷ Al-Tamimi, *Ja'ffar Abul Timman*, p. 55.

³⁸ Nazar T. S. Al-Hassou, *Al-Sira Ala Sulta Fi Iraq Al-Malaki: Dirasa Tahliliya Fi Al-Idara wa Al-Siyasa (Struggle for Power in Monarchist Iraq: An Analytical Study in Administration and politics)* (Baghdad: Afaq Arabiya, 1984), pp. 68-9; Hoping that their act would incite others to rebel against the British, *Jam'iyat Al-Nahdha Al-Islamiya* (Islamic Awakening Society) assassinated a British officer in the holy city of Karbala. Al-Barrak, *Role of the Military*, pp. 77, 83.

It is to be remembered that the political climate in Iraq in the years immediately following British occupation was not universally anti-British. Not all Iraqis were haters of British rule. Those Iraqis, particularly among city dwellers who had regular contact with the new administration, came to admire their new masters for their discipline, diligence and organisation and above all for their ceaseless efforts to impose law and order and build an efficient government machinery on the ruins of the old one which had collapsed almost totally towards the end of Ottoman rule. In addition, the Christian and Jewish minorities welcomed the arrival of the British as it afforded them what they saw at the time as an opportunity to free themselves from the constraints of living within a predominantly Muslim Community.³⁹

The Revolt of 1920

The imprisonment in Rumaitha⁴⁰ on 2nd June 1920 of an influential and highly respected sheikh (Sha'lan Abu Al-Jawn), who had refused to pay a newly introduced agricultural tax, sparked an armed uprising which was to engulf most parts of the country for several months. From this predominantly Shi'a region on the mid-Euphrates the revolt spread to other parts of the country. Within weeks large areas in south-West Iraq passed totally out of British control.

Although London and the British military administration in Baghdad saw the armed opposition as a mere insurgency caused largely by nationalist agitation from the Iraqi officers who were at the time in the retinue of Faisal in Syria, it was in many ways a widely supported revolution that sought to free Iraq from British domination. True,

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 57, 81, 94.

⁴⁰ A small town on the mid-Euphrates. The name has become synonymous with the birthplace of the 1920 Revolt.

the rebel tribesmen were illiterate, disorganised and lacking in political awareness, but their grievances, both economic and political, were intense enough to push them to carry arms.⁴¹

Describing the events that followed Sheikh Sha'lan Abu Jawn's mutiny, Geoff Simons writes:

A full Arab revolt began in June 1920. Military posts were overrun by the Arabs, British soldiers were killed and lines of communications were severed. In the holy city of Karbala a jihad was proclaimed against the British. Leachman [the British colonel celebrated for his travels and military feats in the eastern deserts] was shot in the back by his Arab host, an event that encouraged further efforts to resist British rule. By mid-August 1920 the rebels felt strong enough to announce a provisional Arab government. Over a period of months Britain had lost 450 dead and some 1500 further casualties. By late March the provisional Arab government was no more. The entire operation had cost the British government around £40 million, more than three times the total subsidies for the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman occupation.⁴²

Dismissing London's official view that the Revolt was no more than a foreign inspired insurgency, Phebe Marr agrees with the Iraqi interpretation that the Revolt was "a genuine nationalist rebellion, the first in a series of abortive attempts to overthrow unwanted British rule".⁴³

Iraq Under the British Mandate (1921-1932)

Despite the numerous casualties, high material cost and some division among policy makers, Britain felt that it was still necessary to maintain control of Iraq. But instead of ruling it directly, and thus bear the full brunt of tribal attacks, London decided to adopt a new strategy aimed at minimising human and material loss. It therefore

⁴¹ Marr, *History of Iraq*, p. 33; Ni'meh, *Faisal I*, p. 46.

⁴² Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 212.

embarked upon the execution of a subtle plan in which it continued to rule the land through a puppet regime.

To this end, Sir Percy Cox, the British High Commissioner in Baghdad contacted the local dignitaries and formed a State Council in order to draw up the shape of the future government of Iraq. The Council was headed by the ageing Abdul-Rahman Al-Naqib whose virtues, in the words of Phebe Marr were 'his religious position, family background, and lack of experience in politics - which would leave ample scope for Cox to exercise real authority'.⁴⁴ Despite Al-Naqib's initial refusal to co-operate with the British he decided upon the insistence of Gertrude Bell and the High Commissioner to accept the British offer fearing that the presidency of the Council might be offered to a Shi'a leader, a prospect which the aged Sunni could not stomach.⁴⁵ Al-Naqib's colleagues in the Council were all drawn from distinguished families and tribal chieftains who were expected above all else not to oppose the British policies in Iraq.

Al-Naqib's first (provisional) government was to last from 25 October 1920 to 3 August 1921. It laid the general constitutional structure of Iraq's future government and took the decisive step of calling for the establishment of a monarchy, and upon Cox's insistence it issued a formal invitation to Sharef Hussein's third son Faisal to accept the Iraqi crown.⁴⁶

⁴³ Marr, *History of Iraq*, p. 33.

⁴⁴ *History of Iraq*, p. 34.

⁴⁵ Selim Al-Hasani, *Ru'asa' Al-Iraq 1920-1958 Dirasah fi Ittijahat Al-Hukm (Iraq's Prime Ministers 1920-1958: A Study in Government Orientations)* (London: Dar Al-Hikma, 1992), p. 10.

⁴⁶ Marr, *History of Iraq*, p. 34.

Faisal I

Faisal's nomination for the Iraqi crown extricated him from the debacle in which he found himself after he fell out of favour with the French who had expelled him from the short-lived Kingdom of Syria. It also served as reward for the Hashemites who had led the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans and had stood behind Britain during the Great War. For these and other reasons the deposed Faisal who had taken refuge in London following his eviction from Damascus, was compensated by the Cairo Conference for his loss with the crown of Iraq. Faisal was, from the British point of view, the ideal candidate: he was a descendent of a distinguished family that traced its lineage back to the nobles of ancient Mecca. More importantly, he was perceived to be friendly, quite peaceful and of weak character. Such qualities would naturally give the British a free hand in the kingdom. The drama of installing Faisal as King of Iraq had to be acted out convincingly. After the High Commissioner Sir Percy Cox had 'persuaded' the Council of State to declare Faisal king unanimously a plebiscite soon followed in which 96% of the people indicated their approval of the "king-elect".

The reality however was something quite different: a sizeable proportion of the population expressed objection and rallied behind a local contender, Sheikh Talib Al-Naqib (no relation of Abdul-Rahman Al-Naqib) as they saw in Faisal a British ruler in Arab garb; others, particularly in the Kurdish areas and along the mid- and upper-Tigris simply stayed away from the plebiscite. On 23rd August 1921 however Faisal's pageant proceeded to the old Ottoman government Compound (the Serai) and

formally ascended the throne, commencing the Hashemite rule which was to last until 1958.⁴⁷

Despite unlimited British support, Faisal encountered immense difficulties in his efforts to impose himself as a sovereign ruler. Apart from the fact that the long association of his family with the British made him suspect in the eyes of many Iraqis, there were those who saw in him nothing but an outsider "with no roots in the soil".⁴⁸ However, in the troubled years which followed the founding of the kingdom, Faisal relied heavily on the services of an old friend of his, Nouri Sa'id, who was to play a leading role in the politics of Iraq over the whole period of the monarchy. Opposition to Faisal's rule was further exacerbated by his dependency on the former Sherifian officers who came with him to Baghdad. This tilt towards his own clique to whom he entrusted the highest positions of authority hurt the feelings of most Iraqis and bred popular antagonism.

There were of course other factors which alienated the people from his government, particularly among the Shi'as, who had inherited from Ottoman times a long-established tradition of distrusting the central (Sunni) government. For generations, Iraqi Shi'as were brought up to loath the Baghdad government and look to the Shi'a religious and intellectual centre, Najaf for guidance.⁴⁹ Furthermore, from the start the British, like their predecessors the Ottomans, showed an unmistakable tilt towards the Sunnis. This naturally heightened the Shi'a jealousies, increased their grievances and

⁴⁷ Ni'meh, *Faisal I*, p. 77; Marr, *History of Iraq*, p. 36.

⁴⁸ Liora Lukitz, *Iraq: The Search for National Identity* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 74.

⁴⁹ Abdullah Fahad Al-Nafeesi, *Dawr Al-Shi'a Fi Tattawur Al-Iraq Al-Siyasi Al-Hadith (The Role of the Shi'as in the Political Development of Modern Iraq)* (Beirut: Dar Al-Nahar, 1973), pp. 12-13.

deepened the sectarian division which still plagues the Iraqi community and which, as will be discussed later, the post-Gulf War Iraqi opposition inherited.⁵⁰

There are many reasons why the British preferred Sunni rather than Shi'a leaderships.

In their desire to establish hegemony in the newly conquered land, the British

looked for those who by birth or heredity were natural rulers. In Iraq they looked first to the Arab Sunni urban notables, ex-Ottoman officials, ex-Sharefan officers, to form an administration supported by local tribal leaders.⁵¹

Among the myriad challenges met by the British in Iraq none was as difficult as the task of building a unified state from a community, or rather a number of communities, divided basically along ethnic and denominational lines. Besides the Sunnis, there are the Shi'as who constituted, then as now, the majority of the Muslim Arabs; there are also the Kurds who form approximately one fifth of the population.⁵²

National unity and social cohesion, the two foundation stones without which no state can survive, were markedly absent.⁵³ Faisal was fully aware of this challenge and in a memorandum sent to the Cabinet in 1931, he set forth the problems besetting his country and singled out sectarianism as being a serious menace threatening stability:

Iraq is among the nations which lack the most essential element of social life: religious, sectarian and intellectual unity. It is plagued by internal divisions and in order to be able to govern the land politicians must possess wisdom, patience and experience. These divisions must be addressed for our people are divided into: the

⁵⁰ See Chapters V and VI below.

⁵¹ Derek Hopwood, "Social Structures and the New State" in D. Hopwood, H. Ishow and T. Koszinowski (eds), *Iraq: Power and Society* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1993), p. 12.

⁵² Hopwood, *Social Structures*, p. 11; On account of the claims and counter claims over wide areas in the north and north-West of Iraq where the majority of the Iraqi Kurds exist, no reliable statistics are available. For obvious reasons successive governments in Baghdad have dealt with the population census in the Kurdish region with particular care and secrecy.

⁵³ Muhammad A. Tarbush, *The Role of the Military in Politics: A Case Study of Iraq to 1991* (London: Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 183.

modernist younger generation including the government machinery, the fanatics, the Sunnis, the Shi'as, the Kurds, the non-Muslim minorities, the tribesmen, the Sheiks, and the vast majority of people who are ignorant and prepared to accept any idea uncritically and without any due consideration.⁵⁴

From the beginning of Faisal's reign, British commitment to the preservation of Sunni hegemony over Iraq manifested itself quite clearly. Cabinets were dominated by those Sunnis willing to work with or rather under the British. For show purposes, however, token representatives from among the Shi'a majority, the Kurds, the Christians and the Jews were included.⁵⁵

Despite a policy of appeasement and reconciliation towards the Shi'as which Iraq was never to see again until perhaps General Qassim's rule, Faisal's government did not hesitate to use or threaten to use force when the Shi'as exceeded the limits set by the Sunni establishment.⁵⁶ When, for example, in 1931 the mid-Euphrates Shi'a tribesmen of Samawa rose in arms against the taxation policy of the government, Faisal's troops hastened to deal with the situation. As the troops were no match for the heavily armed rebels, Faisal's men threatened the rebel tribesmen with British aerial bombardment. It was only then that the government forces managed to restore a semblance of law and order in the area.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Abdul-Karim Al-Uzri, *Mushkilat Al-Hukm Fi Al-Iraq (The Problem of Government in Iraq)* (no place or date provided), pp. 2-3.

⁵⁵ Marr, *History of Iraq*, p. 39.

⁵⁶ Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communities, Ba'thists and Free Officers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 26.

⁵⁷ Lukitz, *Iraq*, pp. 76-77. Batatu notes that two years after this uprising, the government was still "much weaker than the people" in that, while there were 100 000 rifles in the country, the government possessed only 15 000. See Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 26.

Most Shi'as in Iraq became disillusioned about the new Faisali regime when their doubts about the orientation of the new government were confirmed. Commenting on the sectarian rift that grew wider after the crowning of Faisal, Phebe Marr points out that the Shi'as were quite co-operative at first:

From the start, Shi'a leaders had been identified with a staunch anti-British position, but in the early stages of opposition some had been willing to co-operate with the more moderate Sunnis. Even as late as April 1922 Ja'far Abul-Timman, a Shi'a businessman and politician of Baghdad known for his strong nationalist views, had been willing to participate in a predominantly Sunni cabinet.⁵⁸

The 1922 Treaty and After

Besides the mutual Sunni-Shi'a distrust, defining the relations with Britain was another crucial issue that faced Faisal and, indeed, all those who succeeded him whether in monarchist or republican Iraq. After the League of Nations had decided to place Iraq under British mandate until such time as it was ready for self-government, Britain preferred to seal their new relationship by a proper and internationally recognised treaty and the first Anglo-Iraqi treaty was signed in October 1922. Although on the face of it the treaty did not have any reference to direct British involvement in all vital matters concerning Iraq, it incorporated practically all the provisions of the mandate. This naturally incensed the nationalists and deepened even further the feelings of resentment towards Britain.⁵⁹

Most Iraqis were in one way or other opposed to the Treaty which was scrutinised and bitterly debated at the Council of Ministers. Ethnic division in Iraq manifested itself in

⁵⁸ *History of Iraq*, p. 44.

the popular attitude towards this treaty. Muslim Arabs resented continued British hegemony while, on the other hand, some Kurds and Christian Arabs felt that decreased links with Britain would expose them to persecution. To appease the opposition and lessen public criticism of the treaty, minor changes and a few modifications were made in a protocol to the treaty which reduced the period of the treaty from twenty to four years. Under heavy British pressure the Constituent Assembly finally ratified it on 11 June 1924 having been threatened that the whole business of the Treaty would be referred to the League of Nations.⁶⁰

Since the Iraqis were practically forced into signing the 1922 Treaty, opposition to the terms of the Treaty and its protocol continued long after its ratification. Further cosmetic modifications were made in 1927 but these produced the same result : popular rejection and opposition.⁶¹ The *Hizb Al-Watani Al-Iraqi* (National Iraqi Party) led by Ja'ffar Abul-Timman allied itself with *Hizb Al-Ikha' Al-Watani* (National Fraternity Party) headed by Yassin Al-Hashimi in order to co-ordinate opposition to the proposed treaty.⁶²

Against this tide of popular resistance Britain announced in 1929 that it was seeking an end to the mandate and that it was ready to grant Iraq full independence and sponsor its admission to the League of Nations in 1932. A further Treaty expected to last twenty-five years was then envisaged to regulate the future relationship. In fact what made Britain agree to reconsider its position in Iraq was not its desire to see the Iraqis independent. Many in Britain, including Sir Winston Churchill, considered the

⁵⁹ Tim Niblock, *Iraq: the Contemporary State* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 3.

⁶⁰ Hopwood, *Social Structures*, p. 10; Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 217

⁶¹ Marr, *History of Iraq*, p. 50.

⁶² Al-Barrak, *Role of the Army*, p. 80.

Iraqis incapable of self-government and looked upon them as “uncivilised tribes”⁶³. The real motives, however, did not go beyond financial considerations. Mandate Iraq was increasingly viewed as a financial drain which alarmed Whitehall and made it consider other less costly ways of controlling it. A new treaty was therefore negotiated and in November 1930 ratified.

With the conclusion of the Iraqi-British 1930 Treaty, which promised Iraq’s independence and nomination for membership in the League of Nations, many of the financial burdens and responsibilities were now transferred to the Iraqis. Among other things, the treaty called for close consultation between the two countries in order to harmonise their foreign policies. It also granted Britain the right to retain military bases in Iraq and use local facilities in times of war.⁶⁴ The man who saw to it that the Treaty was ratified despite outcries against it, was General Nuri Sa’id. His pro-British policies and what seemed as total disregard for national demands came to make him a symbol of hate to many Iraqis and Arabs throughout his political career which spanned four decades. In point of fact during the forties and fifties, many warring opposition groupings felt united in their stand against what they perceived as Nuri’s incessant attempts to fetter Iraq and chain its destiny to that of Britain.

Iraq from Independence to Revolutionary Republicanism (1932-1958)

With the independence of Iraq on 3 October 1932 and its admission to the League of Nations, the British had lulled the Iraqis into a fictitious sense of independence, and London found it necessary to exercise control more indirectly than before.⁶⁵ Despite

⁶³ Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 213

⁶⁴ Marr, *History of Iraq*, p. 50.

⁶⁵ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 325.

their new found independence, the Iraqi populace continued to oppose the 1930 Treaty as it did not put an end to the British power in Iraq. The “new opposition ... was far more broadly based and ably led than the opposition movements of the 1920s”.⁶⁶ Particularly active were the *Al-Ikha' Al-Watani* (National Brotherhood) Party led by Kamil Al-Chaderchi and *Al-Hizb Al-Watani* (National Party) led by Ja'far Abul Timman. The new Treaty triggered a wave of strikes and demonstrations in which people from practically all walks of life participated.

Opposition to helpless Iraqi governments, which had earlier forced a prime minister, Abdul Muhsin Al-Sa'doun, to commit suicide, grew in intensity. Armed clashes with the security forces became quite common. Amidst these conditions of political upheaval and a caught in a complex web of ethnic and religious conflicts, the task of nation building Faisal had embarked upon with the help of the British was seriously impeded. A serious blow came unexpectedly when the founder of the monarchy himself, who had been suffering from heart disease, died before he could complete his mission.

It is now not unusual in revolutionary Iraq to show reverence to the first Arab king since the fall in 1258 of Baghdad, the seat of Abbasid Caliphate, at the hands of the Mongols. “British-made” though he may have been dubbed, Faisal's reconciliatory bent of mind and generosity of spirit disarmed his enemies and won him admirers and followers in Iraq. This is a quite remarkable achievement by a man who was, to all intents and purposes, an “outsider” surrounded by fellow outsiders who, at least during the first few years of his reign, did not have adequate understanding of the

⁶⁶ Marr, *History of Iraq*, p. 52.

needs of the country.⁶⁷ Through a shrewd combination of patience and tolerance Faisal managed to absorb criticism and undermine much of the opposition. A measure of Faisal's leniency may be seen in the fact that he did nothing to those influential individuals who kept insulting him in public by not recognising him as the lawful ruler of the land. In their Friday sermons (*khutbah*) the religious leaders (*Imams*) continued, for three years after the coronation of Faisal, to insult him by calling for prayers by the people for the Ottoman Caliph "in both his spiritual and temporal capacity".⁶⁸

There were of course during Faisal's reign many differences between the government and the people. There were also deep ethnic, religious and social divisions among the people themselves. But Faisal's royal tent, to use an Arabic metaphor, had room enough to embrace many, if not all those differences and divisions, and tactfully managed to silence many voices of dissent.⁶⁹ It is for these reasons that Faisal's death in 1933 is often viewed as a turning point in the political history of Iraq.

King Ghazi

Faisal was succeeded by his only son, the twenty-one year old Ghazi. Unlike his father, the new King who reigned until the start of World War II was impulsive, inexperienced and lacked both political and social acumen. Despite his nationalist zeal and lofty notions of Arab unity, his lack of leadership and inability led to serious problems. Chaos and internal disturbances soon developed as faction leaders competed to fill the

⁶⁷ Batatu., *Social Classes*, p. 322

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 323-4

⁶⁹ Al-Tamimi, *Ja'ffar Abul Timman*, pp. 334-5.



political vacuum, which had opened following Faisal's death. To illustrate how chaotic the situation grew upon the departure of Faisal, we only have to remember that between 1933 and 1939 no fewer than seven coup d'états were staged.⁷⁰ Furthermore, many of the unruly tribes would also revolt for reasons of their own. During the premiership of Yassin Al-Hashimi (March 1935 - October 1936) seven uprisings against the government were suppressed.⁷¹

Throughout the "roaring thirties", opposition to the government was not entirely based on patriotic grounds. Leaders bent on furthering their own cause often turned to their tribes and clans for support and action if need be. Tribal relationships were still much stronger than ideological bonds.⁷² In fact even before Faisal's death in Switzerland and Ghazi's accession, chaos reigned supreme. Minorities and ethnic communities known for their peaceful coexistence with their Arab fellow countrymen rebelled when Faisal was in a Swiss hospital. The Assyrians who were instrumental in helping the British during the mandate threatened to rise in arms against the central government unless they were granted some sort of autonomy.⁷³ It was not easy for the government to deal with the highly ambitious demands of this minority, whose loyalty to the state was questioned by most Muslim Iraqis at the time because of their willingness to serve the British army against their own compatriots.⁷⁴ Mutual distrust led to bloody confrontations and well trained in arms though they were, they were crushed ruthlessly

⁷⁰ Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam* p. 218.

⁷¹ Al-Barrak, *Role of the Army*, p. 68.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁷³ Al-Tamimi, *Ja'ffar Abul Timman*, p. 326.

⁷⁴ Hopwood, *Social Structures*, p. 15.

by an army contingent under General Bakr Sidqi who too was later to figure prominently in the 1936 coup that still bears his name.⁷⁵

Bakr Sidqi: the first coup leader in the Middle East

Sidqi's coup brought to the fore a new breed of young Effendi (urbanite) politicians. Although the roots of politicising the army may be said to go back to King Faisal I, who had assigned ex-Ottoman army officers to the most important and vital political and administrative positions, Sidqi's coup was a turning point not only in the history of modern Iraq but also of the Middle East. It "inaugurated the officers' new style of intervention in political life which rapidly became the norm throughout the Arab world".⁷⁶ Indeed from then until well into the seventies when Saddam Hussein placed his immediate family members and Tikriti clan in the most sensitive posts of the state, no government could come or go without the consent of the armed forces.⁷⁷

The *Ahali* (People) group, formed in January 1932, which was made up of reformist intellectuals who challenged the old style politicians and entertained vague secular notions of equality and social justice reminiscent of the French Revolution, took the lion's share of posts in the cabinet.⁷⁸ The initial popular support for the coup's newly formed government under Hikmet Suleiman as Prime Minister soon faded, as the army officers were not well disposed to liberalism or democracy.⁷⁹ In 1936 General Bakr Sidqi was assassinated at the hands of a disgruntled group of nationalist officers, who

⁷⁵ Marr, *History of Iraq*, p. 71.

⁷⁶ May Chartouni-Dubarry, "The Development of Internal Politics in Iraq from 1958 to the Present Day", *Power and Society*, ed. D. Hopwood, H. Ishow and T. Koszinowski (London: Ithaca Press, 1993), p. 20.

⁷⁷ Tarbush, *Role of the Army* p. 186.

⁷⁸ Al-Tamimi, *Abul-Timman*, p. 388; Marr, *History of Iraq*, p. 73.

⁷⁹ Tarbush, *Role of Military*, p. 186; Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam Iraq*, p. 219.

had always mistrusted the motives of this ambitious Kurd.⁸⁰ This became the customary end of all ambitious officers who forced their way into the political arena. The list of military men whose political careers ended violently is a long one. It includes the Golden Square (the four colonels) of the Government of National Defence, General Nuri Sa'id, General Abdul Karim Qassim and perhaps even General Ahmad Hasan Al-Bakr, Saddam Hussein's own mentor, who were all either butchered or, as in the case of Bakr, died under extremely suspicious circumstances.

Faisal, who is always described as a 'stooge', looks quite able and shrewd when contrasted with his whimsical and indecisive son Ghazi.⁸¹ Under the latter however, and because of the growth and expansion of the urban middle class as well as the open-mindedness of the head of state, political parties experienced a degree of freedom that was seldom to be repeated in the future.

Of the three Hashimite monarchs who succeeded to the throne in Baghdad between 1921 and 1958 Ghazi was, despite his impulsiveness and tragic lack of experience the most popular. His youth, informality, sportsmanship, accessibility and even his eccentricity brought him close to the hearts of the Iraqis. Their love for him grew especially after his rather mysterious death in an automobile accident when he crashed into an electric pylon near his palace about midnight on 3 April 1939. Most Iraqis, then as now, believe that Ghazi's death was a conspiracy in which Nuri Al-Sai'd, Abdul-Ilah, (Ghazi's cousin) and Britain took part to make Ghazi pay with his life for his

⁸⁰ Salim Al-Hasani, *Prime Ministers of Iraq 1920-1958: A Study in Government Orientations* (London: Dar Al-Hikma, 1992), p. 284.

⁸¹ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 324.

political stands which were in some ways hostile to the British.⁸² Following Ghazi's death, Prince Abdul-Ilah (Ghazi's cousin) was declared crown regent since the son of the deceased King was only three years old. It was claimed at the time that the infant king's mother Queen Aliya testified that before his death, King Ghazi had asked that her brother, Prince Abdul-Ilah succeed him to the throne if he were to die before his son came of age.

The Rise of Nuri Al-Sai'd

Before the eruption of World War II Nuri Sa'id, the real architect of Monarchist Iraq, and his supporters in the army pressured Hikmet Suleiman to modify some of what they considered to be radical policies.⁸³ The pressure was so threatening that Hikmet had to resign. Jamil Al-Madfa'i succeeded him as prime minister. Al-Madfa'i's soft approach and conciliatory programme, though backed by the King, did not satisfy Nuri's influential group who sought the punishment of Hikmet Suleiman and his supporters. When Al-Madfa'i failed to respond to Nuri's demands, the army intervened and forced the cabinet to resign.⁸⁴ With the help of his officer friends, Nuri Sa'id succeeded in seizing power and forming the third of his fourteen cabinets.⁸⁵ Nuri immediately expelled Hikmet Suleiman's collaborators and sympathisers from the armed forces and convicted Suleiman and many of his followers on a trumped up charge of treason.

⁸² Most books written by Iraqis on King Ghazi endorse one or more aspects of the conspiracy theory. A full discussion of the King's alleged 'murder' is given in Abdul Rahman Al-Jalili, *Al-Malik Ghazi wa Qatilah: Baritaniya. Abdul Ilah wa Nuri Al-Sa'id (King Ghazi and his Murderers: Britain, Abdul-Ilah and Nuri aAl'Sa'id)* (London: Dar Al-Hikma, 1993).

⁸³ Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 219.

⁸⁴ Marr, *History of Iraq*, p. 77.

⁸⁵ Hopwood, *Social Structures*, p. 12.

World War II

Nuri Sa'id used the outbreak of World War II as a stick with which to beat his opponents in order to crush all political dissent in his cabinet as well as throughout the country. He brought Iraq on to the side of the Allies and, against the wishes of many in his cabinet, severed diplomatic relations with Germany. The early success of the armies of Hitler, particularly the swift occupation of the countries adjacent to Nazi Germany, encouraged the anti-British camp. There was increasing support in the cabinet, in the political parties and in the populace as well to detach Iraq from its commitments contained in the 1930 Treaty and to declare Iraq neutral.

At the time Italy entered the war Nuri Sa'id was Foreign Minister but he could not persuade his fellow cabinet members to break off diplomatic relations with Rome. With the progress of the war, particularly after the spectacular victories scored by Hitler's advancing armies⁸⁶, the Iraqi government under Rashid Ali Al-Gailani felt encouraged to show increasing hostility towards the British since Britain and the Allies appeared to be losing ground. Therefore, Al-Gailani's government embarked upon secret talks with the Axis. When Al-Gailani's government stopped the flow of oil to the West by cutting off the pipeline to Haifa, the Nazis welcomed this move to the extent that they ordered the dispatch of Vichy arms from Syria to Baghdad. Hitler's Germany also sent experts to offer Al-Gailani political advice.⁸⁷ Early in 1941 however Rashid Ali was forced to quit but his enthusiastic supporters in the army soon reinstated him.

Developments of the war required reinforcement of the British troops stationed in Iraq in accordance with the 1930 treaty. Not willing to co-operate with its erstwhile

occupiers, armed conflict between Iraq and Britain broke out and after a feeble resistance to the superior and better equipped British troops Rashid Ali's forces lost and he had to flee the country and head for his German patrons. The crown prince who had fled Baghdad was duly reinstated and a new era in the history of modern Iraq began. The fall of Al-Gailani's government, known as the 'National Defence government', was followed by a period of extensive purges and retribution. This was aimed not only as punishment against those who led the coup but also as lesson to other officers and politicians. The four colonels, also referred to as the Golden Square: Salah Al-Din Al-Sabbagh, Muhammad Fahmi Sa'id, Mahmud Salman and Kamil Shabib, who had propped up Rashid Ali throughout his short career as prime minister, were court-martialled and executed.⁸⁸

The political climate in Iraq underwent some change after World War II. Hoping to appease the growing opposition to the government, which was largely perceived as a puppet of the British authorities, Prince Abdul-Ilah attempted to liberalise and offer political parties an opportunity to work with relative freedom. Between 1945 and 1951 several parties were licensed. These included *Hizb Al-Sha'b* -the People's Party which was licensed in 1946, *Hizb Al-Ittihad Al-Watani* - The Party of National Unity (1946), *Hizb Al-Watani Al-Dimoqrati* - the National Democratic Party (1946), *Hizb Al-Istiqlal* - the Independence Party (1946), *Hizb Al-Ahrar* - the Liberal Party (1946), *Hizb Al-Ittihad Al-Dusturi* -The Constitutional Union Party (1949), *Hizb Al-Ittihad wal Islah Al-Ijtima'i* - The Party of Unity and Social Reform (1949), *Hizb Al-Ummah Al-Ishtiraki* - the Popular Socialist Party (1951), *Al-Jabha Al-Sha'biya Al-Muttahida* - the United

⁸⁶ Stephen J. Lee, *The European Dictatorships 1918-1945* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 293.

⁸⁷ Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam* p. 220.

Popular Front (1951). Besides these there were also the parties that operated underground such as the Communist Party which was founded in 1934, and the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party which was founded in Syria in 1947 but did not operate in Iraq until four years later.⁸⁹ It must be pointed out that while these parties were better organised than those of the twenties and thirties, they did not have large memberships and were active mainly during election times or when there was a national emergency or crisis - of which there were many.

Salih Jabr: the first Shi'a Prime Minister

It was during this period that the first Shi'a politician became a prime minister in Iraq. In his first cabinet, which he formed in 1948, Salih Jabr⁹⁰ included a number of young reformists.⁹¹ Jabr is remembered in Iraqi politics for his ill-fated attempt to modify the terms of the 1930 Treaty. Without authorization from his cabinet or party leaders he negotiated and signed the 20 year Portsmouth Treaty. Although the new Treaty was an improvement on the 1930 Treaty, it was met with immediate rejection in a popular uprising known to the Iraqis as the *Wathba* -the Leap- which was, in the words of Hanna Batatu, "the most formidable mass insurrection in the history of the monarchy"⁹² In the rioting that followed Jabr's signing of the Treaty, which never saw the light of day, several people, mainly young students and workers particularly of the Shalchiya Iron Factory West of Baghdad, were killed when the police opened fire with machine guns on the oldest of bridges in Baghdad which was renamed in 1958 as *Jisr Al-Shuhada* (the Bridge of the Martyrs) in commemoration of the *Wathbah*.

⁸⁸ Marr, *History of Iraq*, pp. 79-80.

⁸⁹ Elliot, *Independent Iraq*, pp. 181-83.

⁹⁰ The father of Sa'ad Salih Jabr, a London-based opposition leader at present.

Salih Jabr was forced to quit but his departure did nothing to mollify opposition to the government which continued even after the repudiation of the Treaty and the re-entry of the more experienced and devious of the old guard, Nuri Sa'id. The fierce competition between the new Effendi politicians represented by Salih Jabr and the older and more politically entrenched figures continued unabated, especially as the older generation did not countenance any measures aimed at liberalisation and reform.⁹³ Calls for the abolition of the old system of representation and the introduction of direct parliamentary elections went unheeded.

During this period the setbacks suffered by Arab armies at the hands of the newly created state of Israel only added fuel to the fire. Opposition leaders now entwined the Palestinian cause with those internal issues which they struggled to achieve. In October 1952, leaders of the anti-government forces which included the parties of *Istiqlal* (Independence), *Al-Hizb Al-Watani Al-Dimocrati* (the National Democrats), *Ansar Al-Salam* (the Partisans of Peace, the front arm of the banned Communist Party) and the newly formed *Al-Jabha Al-Sha'biya Al-Muttahidah* (United Popular Front) put forward a petition to the Regent demanding the granting of civil liberties, abolition of the outdated two stage method of voting and abrogation of the 1930 Treaty. They also reminded Prince Abdul-Ilah that he should not interfere in the business of running the country as he was supposed to reign and not rule.⁹⁴ When these demands were rejected, agitation broadened and intensified, first in Baghdad then in other parts of the country especially in Najaf. When the situation got out of hand the Regent asked the chief of staff of the army, General Nur-ud-Din Mahmud to form a new government:

⁹¹ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 546.

Within hours he proclaimed martial law, dissolved the opposition parties, locked up their leaders, and ordered arrests all over Baghdad. But the real power of the insurrectionary crowds, the invisible Communist party centre, remained intact. On the morning of 24 November, therefore, the demonstrations, now decrying the 'dictatorship of the English spy Nur-ud-Din Mahmud, ' began again, and did not subside until the evening, when troops opened fire on the crowds in the plebeian quarter of Bab-ish-Shaikh and killed eighteen and wounded eighty-four.... By the end of November, in the entire country 958 persons had been thrown into jail, 2041 temporarily detained and 2 condemned to death.⁹⁵

Faisal II

Upon the ascension of King Faisal II to the throne in 1953, his maternal uncle the Regent continued to pull the strings from behind the scenes, relying heavily on the services of Nuri Sa'id. Fearing a Nasserite type, or Communist inspired coup, Nuri strove to strengthen even further Iraq's ties with the Western powers on whose support the security of the regime depended. When, in 1955, the 1930 Treaty expired, having run its full course of twenty-five years, Nuri along with the Shah of Iran and other - Western oriented countries in the region (Turkey and Pakistan) entered into a close alliance with Britain through the Baghdad Pact Organisation. This and other unpopular measures, such as the hastily declared merger of the Hashemite kingdoms of Iraq and Jordan into the Arab Union which was basically intended to counter-balance the United Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria, only increased popular opposition and etched even deeper the feelings of resentment among wider segments of the society.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 545.

⁹³ Elliot, *Independent Iraq*, pp. 28-29.

⁹⁴ Batatu, *Social Classes*, pp. 667.

⁹⁵ Batatu, *Social classes*, pp. 669-670.

With the possible exception of General Nur Aldin Mahmud, who had relied heavily on the army to confront demonstrators and quell agitation, Iraqi governments before and after him, normally resorted to the police forces to deal with mass protests and demonstrations.⁹⁶ During the troubled fifties, when the army was called in it was usually to act as a peace keeper whose main task was to separate the conflicting parties rather than as an authoritarian instrument of suppression. When, for example, during the Suez crisis almost all students and workers in Baghdad and other cities demonstrated against Nuri Sa'id in support of Nasser only tear gas, as opposed to live ammunition, was fired in the air and protesters were peacefully evicted from their entrenched positions in schools and colleges.

Following the signing of the Baghdad Pact in 1955, popular opposition manifested itself in practically all aspects of Iraqi life: strikes, demonstrations, graffiti, walkouts and other forms of protest were resorted to. The price for corruption, nepotism and disregarding popular sentiments and aspirations was to be paid dearly. The social, economic and political tensions, which had been growing, finally exploded in 1958.⁹⁷ The Organisation of the so-called Free Officers took the initiative by plotting a military take-over. On 14th July 1958 the Hashemite regime was toppled and the key figure in the history of monarchist Iraq, Nuri Sa'id, was killed by an angry mob.⁹⁸

Iraq Under Qassim (1958-1963)

The military coup of 1958 was championed by Brigadier Abdul-Karim Qassim and Colonel Abdul-Salam Aref. These two allies took advantage of the orders given to them

⁹⁶ Al-Hassou, *Struggle for Power*, p. 153.

⁹⁷ Hopwood, *Social Structure*, p. 16.

⁹⁸ Marr, *History of Iraq*, p. 122.

by Nuri Sa'id, who had been "alarmed by the growing crisis in Lebanon and the enmity of the UAR" to proceed to Jordan, in order to reinforce Iraq's partner in the hastily declared Arab Union.⁹⁹ Instead of continuing their journey from Baghdad which they had reached in the early hours of dawn, they attacked the Royal Residence and captured the Baghdad Broadcasting Station. Colonel Abdul-Salam Aref personally read Communiqué No.1 in which the fate of the Hashemite Kingdom was sealed and a new republic was declared.

Mindful of the complexities and legal wrangling following the Egyptian coup against King Farouq who was deposed and deported and also of the Bakr Sidqi coup during which the Regent left the country temporarily only to return victoriously and crush the Rashid Ali regime, the "Free Officers" decided to finish off the question of succession to the throne by shooting members of the royal family as they surrendered to the rebels.¹⁰⁰ Brigadier Qassim appointed himself prime minister, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces as well as Minister of Defence. A three-man Council of Presidency made up of a Sunni (Nejib Al-Rubai'i), a Shi'a (Muhammad Mahdi Kubbah) and a Kurd (Khalid Al-Naqshabandi) was entrusted with the task of head of state.

At first the 1958 coup was quite popular. People poured on to the streets of Baghdad to hail the rebels, offer assistance and respond to the officers' call to "attack imperialism and its agents", although many were driven by curiosity "to see the world turned upside down and, in some cases to exact a violent revenge on figures and symbols of the Hashemites and their British patrons"¹⁰¹. One result of the popular response to the

⁹⁹ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 146.

¹⁰⁰ Hasan Al-Alawi, *Abdul-Karim Qassim* (London: Dar Al-Zawra' Publications, 1983), p. 30.

¹⁰¹ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p. 149.

rebels' call was the massacre of the young King, his uncle Prince Abdul Ilah, Nuri Sa'id as well as Ibrahim Hashim, the Jordanian Prime Minister of the newly created Arab Union, who happened to be on an official visit.¹⁰² The first republican cabinet included a wide variety of political orientations. Supporting the zealous officers was a loose grouping of Communists, Ba'thists, National Democrats, Arab Nationalists and independents. But the honeymoon period came to a bloody end and over the four and a half years which followed Qassim lost the support of each these parties and groupings.¹⁰³

The failure of Qassim's internal policy was only matched by that of his foreign policy. While for different reasons the Ba'thists, Kurds, Communists, Arab nationalists and above all his fellow "free officers" deserted him and consistently conspired to overthrow him, regional and international opposition to his erratic handling of Iraqi relations with the outside world, except perhaps the USSR, was steadily mounting. Nasser's mammoth propaganda machine was, on top of this, inciting the Iraqi and Arab masses to stand up to Qassim's policies. Nasser's anti-Qassim campaign was comprised of vitriolic radio propaganda and covert operations led by the UAR's intelligence agencies operating out of the Northern Province[Syria].¹⁰⁴ There were of course many reasons behind Nasser's antagonism towards the Qassim regime. As Andrew Rathmell points out,

Nasser felt threatened by Qassim's regime, both because it stole some of his 'anti-imperialist' limelight and because he feared that Qassim was an instrument of the Communists who hoped to detach Iraq from

¹⁰² Alawi, *Qassim*, pp. 36-7.

¹⁰³ Niblock, *Iraq*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Andrew Rathmell, *Secret War in the Middle East* (London, Tauris Academic Studies, 1995), p. 154

the Arab world and use it as a base for further encroachment in the region.¹⁰⁵

Qassim's threat to invade Kuwait which, like King Ghazi before and Saddam Hussein later, he claimed to be part of Iraq, brought the country to the verge of military confrontation not only with the Arab armies which hastened to the defence of the newly independent, oil rich state but also with the United Kingdom which also sent troops to defend the ex-British protectorate.

Qassim's main problem was that he had no clear strategy or vision except perhaps his rather quixotic quest to build an "immortal republic". His popularity plummeted so dramatically and so fast that anti-Qassim demonstrations began to take place just a few months after he had been hailed by the masses as a saviour:

The first to abandon him was the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, then the Independence Party. He then differed with the Communist Party and parted ways with the National Democrats. The Independent Democrats then resigned their ministerial posts followed by Kurdish Democratic Party. The national leader was left with no National Front. ... Abul Karim Qassim considered his Revolution to be the proper substitute for all political parties and movements and that it was incumbent upon the political leaders to follow his leadership.¹⁰⁶

Qassim's regime, it must be remembered, was born with a most serious defect: the extreme fragmentation of the officer corps who lacked 'cohesion and organisation due, amongst other things, to the movement's relatively short gestation period'.¹⁰⁷ With the passage of time Qassim became totally isolated and many of his fellow officers tried

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Alawi, *Abdul-Karim Qassim*, p. 122.

several times to oust him or even assassinate him.¹⁰⁸ Qassim's urban upbringing and his lack of 'traditional familial or regional networks of allegiance' deprived him of the broad base of support indispensable for survival.¹⁰⁹

An attempt on his life masterminded by the Ba'thists, in which the then 22 years old Saddam Hussein played a leading part, caused permanent damage to his left arm and almost killed him. Soon after he was left with practically no supporters except a handful of officers and some segments of Shi'as who felt that he was not as Sectarian as the old monarchist rulers had been. In February 1963 a group of nationalist and Ba'thist officers staged a successful coup and after a two hour trial executed him in the presence of his erstwhile soul mates and colleagues of the Free Officers Organisation.

The 1963 coup and after

The leaders of the coup then invited none other than Abdul Salam Aref, who had been Qassim's right hand man and deputy, to assume the office of President of the Republic. The 1963 coup was immediately followed by a period of severe repression particularly against the Communists.¹¹⁰ Although he was careful to appear more Nasserite than Nasser himself, Aref was in fact a conservative pragmatist. Despite the many differences between the personalities, leadership style and programmes, Qassim and Aref were similar in more than one vital point: like the regime it supplanted, Aref tried hard to concentrate power in his own hands:

¹⁰⁷ M Chartouni-Dubarry, *Internal Politics*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁸ Abdul Karim Farhan, *Hasad Thawrah: Muthakkarat Tajribat Al-Sultah fil-Iraq (Harvest of Revolution: Memoirs of the Years of Government in Iraq)* (London: Dar Al-Barraq, London, 1994), p.65.

¹⁰⁹ Hopwood, *Social Structures*, p. 25.

¹¹⁰ Niblock, *Iraq*, p. 4.

Following the example of Qassim, Aref emerged as the strong man of a military regime. Like him he had no intention whatsoever of anchoring the legitimacy of his power in a parliamentary and democratic system. But in contrast to Qassim, he did not try to play off one party against another, but quite simply proceeded to effect the dissolution of all political parties, no longer relying on the hard core of Nasserist officers.¹¹¹

The period from 8th February 1963 to July 30th 1968 is characterised by plots and counter-plots. Aref could not tolerate the excesses of the conspiratorial Ba'thists, who considered themselves above the law. When, in November 1963, the situation deteriorated into a stand-off between the armed forces and the 'national guards', whose allegiance was to the party rather than the state, Aref stepped in. Rallying the armed forces behind him, Aref succeeded in expelling the Ba'thists and their sympathisers from power.

Shortly after that a number of unsuccessful coup attempts were staged against Aref, particularly by the ousted Ba'thists. During this troubled period, Saddam Hussein, whose 1959 attempt on Qassim and subsequent escape across the desert into Syria had made him into something of a legend, quickly rose from amongst the rank and file of the Ba'th party to become in 1964 member of the Regional Command Council. From his underground hideouts Saddam continued to consolidate his position and reunite the party in order that it might be better prepared to seize power at the first available opportunity:

Plans for coup attempts against Aref were scheduled for mid September 1964 at the latest; in one plan, Saddam would lead a group of armed Ba'thists to assassinate the entire Iraq leadership during a cabinet meeting; in another, Aref's plane would be shot down. Both

¹¹¹ M Chartouni-Dubarry, *Internal Politics*, p. 27.

schemes were uncovered by the Iraqi secret services, resulting in further repression of the Ba'th and its leadership.¹¹²

Aref however survived all of these attempts only to die suddenly on an April day 1966 in a helicopter crash under suspicious circumstances.¹¹³ Abdul-Salam's elder brother Abdul-Rahman Aref, an undistinguished military officer, was then hastily declared President. Under his rather weak and unenlightened leadership, divisions and factionalism became rife amongst the armed forces and morale eroded.

Less repressive than the Qassim or the first Aref regimes, Abdul Rahman did not, or rather could not, muzzle the opposition. Communists, Nasserites and especially Ba'thists showed signs of reborn strength and aggressiveness. These actively and almost openly conspired to topple his fragile regime, particularly after the humiliating Arab defeat at the hands of the Israelis during the June (Six-Day) war in 1967 which most political parties blamed on their regimes for their lack of preparation.

Exploiting the sense of frustration and bitterness felt by the Iraqis and indeed the Arabs as a whole, the Ba'thists, who had never forgiven themselves for letting power slip from their hands in November 1963, redoubled their efforts to restore what Abdul Salam Aref and his cronies in the army had snatched from them. Their ceaseless efforts won over a handful of overly ambitious and disgruntled army officers including Abdul Razzaq Al-Nayef, chief of military intelligence and his friend Abdul-Rahman Al-Dawood. This man held the sensitive post: of commander

¹¹² Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 276.

of the Republican Guards, who swiftly managed to overthrow the government on 17th July 1968 in what the rebels called a “white revolution”.¹¹⁴ The task was made quite easy as the regime of Abdul-Rahman Aref was widely perceived to be both inefficient and corrupt. General Ahmed Hasan Al-Bakr, who was Prime Minister in the first Ba’thist government, became President.

Ba’thist Iraq Under the Al-Bakr-Saddam Hussein Alliance (1968-1979)

On 17 July 1968, the deposed president Aref was exiled and two weeks later on 30th July the non-Ba’thist leaders, Al-Nayif and Al-Dawoud¹¹⁵ were removed from office in what was described as a correctionist revolutionary move. In so doing the Ba’thists ensured that they had a total monopoly of power. Although Ahmad Hasan Al-Bakr occupied the post of President of the Republic and Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, the daunting task of running the government and its security was entrusted to the Deputy Chairman, Saddam Hussein, whose secretive henchmen and loyal security apparatus formed a solid power base upon which he could rely in the years immediately after the coup and also later when he became better equipped to take over the Presidential Palace.¹¹⁶

Barely a few weeks passed before Saddam embarked upon a systematic process of eliminating his opponents. These included any figure who might one day pose the slightest threat to his position. To avoid waging war on internal and external fronts at

¹¹³ Faisal Hassoun, *Masra' Al-Mushir Al-Rukkun Abdul Salam Aref: Hal Kana Mu'amara am min sun' Al-Qadha; wa Al-Qadar? The Death of Abdul Salam Aref : Conspiracy or Fate ?* (London: Dar Al-Hikmeh, 1995), p. 8.

¹¹⁴ The new rebels were particularly concerned about the past image of the Ba’th Party as a grouping of ruthless and bloodthirsty elements who would stop at nothing to ensure control. Hence the euphemism.

¹¹⁵ Al-Nayif was later assassinated by Saddam’s hit squads on a London street in July 1978. Al-Dawoud has been since his expulsion living in exile in Saudi Arabia. See Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 278.

the same time, Saddam started by either taming or eliminating potential contenders within his party first. Those included military officers towards whom the young revolutionary felt a kind of inferiority complex, as his dream of joining the military academy had been frustrated when he was denied admission. There were also those civilian members of the party whose stature and popularity he feared might prove more than a thorn in his side.

The two military generals who stood in his way were Hardan Al-Tikriti and Salih Mahdi Ammash both of whom had played decisive roles in the 1963 and 1968 coups. The two generals felt that Saddam was taking more than his share of power but were unable to stop his steady rise as he enjoyed the full confidence and support of President Ahmad Hasan Al-Bakr. In time the two men were stripped of their military positions and ordered to leave the country and take up diplomatic posts: Hardan as ambassador to Morocco, Ammash to the Soviet Union. The first, who was reputed for his dashingness and strong-headedness decided against the express wish of Al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein, to leave his diplomatic post and return to Baghdad. Upon his arrival in Kuwait for a medical check up, it was widely rumoured in Baghdad that he was preparing to seize power.¹¹⁷ He was assassinated at the entrance to the Hospital by four unidentified gunmen whose identities remain "unknown". The latter, Salih Mahdi Ammash, continued to serve as ambassador until he died mysteriously in Finland in 1984 having just returned from Baghdad to which he had been recalled for urgent consultation.

¹¹⁶ Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 278.

¹¹⁷ Majid Khadduri, *Socialist Iraq* (Washington D. C: The Middle East Institute, 1978), p. 60.

On the civilian front there were many potential rivals. Of these two major opponents seemed to have threatened Saddam's position: Abdul-Karim Al-Sheikhli who served as Iraq's Foreign Minister and Ambassador to the United Nations during the late sixties and early seventies was murdered in full view of passers-by near his home in Al-Adhamiya in 1976.¹¹⁸ The other is Abdul-Khaliq Al-Samarra'i who had won young Saddam to the Ba'th Party in the mid fifties. Al-Samarra'i, who was highly respected for his integrity, humility and principled postures, was at first sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour then executed in 1979 on charges of treason.

Other party leaders who were dropped from membership of the Revolution Command Council, the highest governing body in the land include: Abdulla Salloum, who was first sent to India in 1971 as ambassador and then thrown in jail, and Izzat Mustafa the influential physician who provided money and refuge to the Ba'thists in the pre-1968 coup days. He was also stripped of all party and government posts.¹¹⁹

Nadhim Gazzar's Coup

In his unabated drive to impose his leadership on the party and through the party on the country, it cannot be said that Saddam Hussein's way was smooth and easy. Among the serious contenders for the leadership of the party who almost succeeded in snatching power from the Saddam Hussein and Hassan Al-Bakr alliance was the fearless and impulsive Shi'a chief of police Nadhim Gazzar. Gazzar had a reputation for ruthlessness in his dealings with the regime's opponents, who included the

¹¹⁸ S. Henderson, *Instant Empire: Saddam Hussein's Ambition for Iraq* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1991), p. 194. A detailed list of murdered party members, opponents and others who differed with the Ba'thists is given in Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear* (London: Penguin Books, 1986).

Communists, the Nasserites, the Syrian-oriented (dissident) Ba'thists and of course members of the Kurdish movements.

It is often stated that Gazzar's major grievance against the Party leadership was that he considered their attitude to the Communists and Kurds too soft to achieve settlement and called for harsher methods to be adopted against them. It seems however that Gazzar, like Hardan Al-Tikriti and Salih Mahdi Ammash before him, thought that Saddam Hussein was taking more than the lion's share of power. He also felt that the Tikriti influence was growing greater and greater with each day and that the services he was rendering to the regime were not fully appreciated.¹²⁰ To remove Saddam Hussein and Al-Bakr from power Gazzar had at first to secure control over the army and police. To that end, he duped the Ministers of Defence and of the Interior to visit a newly established counter-espionage compound outside Baghdad. Upon arrival they were taken hostage. Gazzar had earlier stationed a police unit at the airport with orders to open fire at Saddam Hussein and Al-Bakr upon arrival from a state visit abroad. When by sheer accident the plane did not arrive on time the plotters panicked believing the conspiracy had been discovered. Seven days later Gazzar and twenty co-plotters were executed.¹²¹

Saddam Hussein Consolidates Power

During the early years of Ba'th rule Saddam Hussein continued to pay lip service to the National and Democratic Front which included the Communist Party, the Kurds, Nationalists and Independents. But Saddam Hussein viewed all participants in the

¹¹⁹ Khadduri, *Socialist Iraq*, p. 60.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64-65.

Front as a “rubber stamps”. While he succeeded in winning over a number of independents, nationalists and Kurds, the Communists proved difficult to deal with. Ba’th relations with the Communist Party reached a crisis point in 1976 when *Tareeq Al-Sha’ab* (The People’s Path), the official party organ, was banned. Later on a number of junior military officers and young recruits were executed because of their affiliation with the Communist Party.

While dismantling all potential circles of opposition, Saddam Hussein was at the same time diligently but quietly assigning one sensitive post after another to members of his family or to his Tikriti clan. He did not rest until by 1977, he had “complete power over the party, the army, the security services, the courts - over all the organs of the Iraqi state”.¹²²

Saddam Hussein’s populist policies, on the other hand, succeeded in producing a somewhat favourable impact on many Shi’as who, except for a handful landowners and merchants, had been economically depressed. He embarked upon extensive tours of the Shi’a towns and villages, handing out cash presents and granting demands for expansion in public works and social services. His huge propaganda machines also pictured him as a defender of the poor and needy in society. Saddam however angered the Shi’as when, during the late seventies, he felt strong enough to challenge the Shi’a age-old tradition of celebrating the annual anniversary of the death of Hussein, Prophet Muhammad’s cousin. Clashes between Shi’a demonstrators and security forces often erupted and in February 1977 army troops were called to quell the Khan Al-Nuss anti-government demonstrations. In that ominous incident in

¹²² Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, pp. 284-85.

which the Shi'a clergy played a major role, some pilgrims were killed and 2000 people were arrested including the influential Muhammad Baqir Al-Haqim. Some of those detainees appeared before a special court set up to investigate the incidents. Eight religious leaders were executed and fifteen sentenced to life imprisonment.¹²³

From 1979 onwards, *Hizb Al-Da'wah Al-Islamiya* (the Islamic Call Party) which was headed by the spiritual leader Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadir was blamed for a number of terrorist attacks, bombing raids and assassination attempts on Ba'thist leaders such as Tariq Aziz and Michael Aflaq (both of whom incidentally are Christian)¹²⁴ as well as conducting suicide missions against government buildings housing such sensitive organisations as the Baghdad Broadcasting Station, the Air Force Command Headquarters, the Iraqi News Agency and the Ministry of Planning. In reprisal, thousands upon thousands of Shi'as were imprisoned, tortured or altogether liquidated. Others were literally thrown at the Iraq-Iran border or were issued with a one-way ticket and forcibly deported. The head of *Da'wah* Party was arrested several times and was later executed with his sister Bint Al-Huda in April 1980.¹²⁵

Iraq Under President Saddam Hussein (1979 – the Present day)

When, on 16 July 1979, President Ahmad Hasan Al-Bakr officially resigned or was pushed to resign few people doubted who his successor would be. Less than two

¹²³ Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: L. B. Tauris, 1990), pp. 198-9.

¹²⁴ Upon Aflaq's death in 1989, the government of Iraq issued an impassioned and obviously cynical obituary in which it declared that Aflaq had converted to Islam years before his death. See *Al-Jumhouria* March 26th 1989.

weeks after his assumption of power as President, Saddam Hussein announced the discovery of a plot against him. Within days, twenty two senior party leaders were found guilty and executed. With this gory inauguration Saddam Hussein forced all opposition to go underground and take exceptional care in developing a viable defence mechanism in order to guard against total destruction. Many opposition leaders, Shi'a Islamists, Communists as well as nationalists, took advantage of the deteriorating relations between Baghdad and Damascus and took refuge in Syria which Saddam Hussein had accused of engineering a coup against him.

The Shi'as were particularly disappointed to discover that Saddam Hussein whom they had considered less sectarian and prejudiced against them than his predecessor, was even more intent on frustrating Shi'a aspirations and on wiping out any influence their religious leaders might have over their traditional strongholds such as Najaf and Karbala, and the southern regions of the country in general. Saddam's fears of Shi'a agitation grew following the success of the Iranian Revolution in the early weeks of 1979. He became quite nervous and embarked upon a systematic policy that sought to discredit even further Shi'a community and religious leaders. At the same time he "began praying with greater frequency, at both Shi'a and Sunni shrines".¹²⁶

When in the summer of 1979, Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr requested that he lead a procession to Tehran to congratulate Khomeini on behalf of the Iraqi Shi'as, permission was denied and close surveillance of the movements of Shi'a leaders was ordered. Thousands of Iraqi Shi'as, whose fathers and grandfathers were born on

¹²⁵ Sheikh Muhammad Naman Al-Ramadhani, *Al-Shaheed Al-Sadir; Sanawat Al-Mihna wa Ayyam Al-Hisar (Martyr Al-Sadir: The Years of Predicament and Days of Blockade)* (Qum: Al-Matba'a Al-Ilmiya, 1996), p. 324.

¹²⁶ Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 309.

Iraqi soil were summarily deported and their property confiscated on the grounds that they were of Iranian origin. There was of course an economic dimension to these drastic measures. The Shi'as had, by tradition, controlled most of the activities of the private sector. By deporting those of *Taba'iya Iraniya* (Iranian extraction), Saddam Hussein's regime was also trying to "liberate" the Iraqi economy from the "clutch" of the merchants who were perceived as potential enemies of the state. Although the coffers of the regime were overflowing with petrodollars, the assets seized were used to buy loyalty from rural Sunnis and Tikritis, especially those working for the General Intelligence and Security agencies. The discovery of a number of assassination attempts on leading Iraqi officials further undermined relations between Tehran and Baghdad.¹²⁷

Border skirmishes steadily grew in August and September 1980 and Saddam Hussein announced the abrogation of the 1975 Treaty which, among other things, partitioned the Shatt Al-Arab waterway along the "thalweg line". Following Iran's rejection of this move the war of words was abandoned in favour of an all out war that began in late September 1980 and did not end until 8th of August 1988.¹²⁸

The impact on the lives of the two peoples was immense. In Iraq hundreds of thousands of young men lost their lives on the war fronts. Although at the end of hostilities the Iraqi government promised to publish the figures relating to the number of people killed, wounded or lost, it has not yet made good on its promise. Obviously it is too embarrassed to do so. One tragic result of the war against Iran was the destruction of Iraqi infrastructure and the collapse of the Iraqi economy:

¹²⁷ Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'as of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 137-38.

Oil revenues were stagnant, despite several new pipelines. On the other side of the balance sheet, Iraq's suppliers, after seven years of accepting delayed payments for goods, were being tougher in demanding repayment for old debts, and meaner in offering new credits. The country was desperately short of money.... [the] deficit was more than half of what Iraq was expected to earn from oil. The country either had to boost production by 40 percent, and hope that the price remained constant, or seek a 40 percent increase in oil prices.¹²⁹

The social and economic dislocations caused by the war had not been healed, or even addressed, before Saddam Hussein miscalculated yet again in ordering his military commanders to invade Kuwait. It was only natural that Saddam Hussein would consider such an adventurous course of action in order to lessen, if not bring to a speedy conclusion, his dire economic problems.

Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait did not come as a total surprise to the West. As Simon Henderson points out, 'the backdoor thinkers and analysts' in Washington who had access to diplomatic correspondence and intelligence reports saw Iraq's annoyance and edginess and drew attention to Iraq's continuous pressure on Kuwait and cautioned against a possible attack by the Republican Guards.¹³⁰ Saddam Hussein had hoped that seizing the rich tiny state which previous Iraqi rulers had claimed before him as an Iraqi territory, would meet his desperate need for funds and end the economic crisis that was strangling the regime.

¹²⁸ Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 310.

¹²⁹ Simon Henderson, *Instant Empire: Saddam Hussein's Ambition for Iraq* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1991), p. 219.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 217-18. See also Wafiq Al-Samarra'i, *Hattam Al-Bawwaba Al-Sharqiyya (Destroyer of the Eastern Gateway)* (Kuwait: Dar Al-Qabas, 1997), p. 218.

On 2nd August 1990 he ordered his generals to lead the army into Kuwait. The order was based on a number of naïve and unrealistic assumptions.¹³¹ It was kept even from the Minister of Defence, Chief of Staff and Director of Military Intelligence.¹³² More than any other decision he had taken before, the invasion of Kuwait brought upon even more catastrophes on his people and indeed on the neighbouring Gulf states.¹³³ The price for his rash policies is still being paid by his people who have been asked again and again to suffer economic privations in every aspect of their lives.¹³⁴ What aggravated the suffering of the Iraqi people even more was the corruption and mismanagement of their economy. Their rich resources had, since Saddam Hussein came to power, been squandered on costly military projects such as the Tammuz nuclear reactor, which was destroyed in an Israeli air raid in 1981, the purchase of sophisticated French and Russian military aircraft that were either shot down during Desert Storm or flown to Iran which later refused to return them, or on such expensive "capex" as the super gun which the United Nations Special Committee for the elimination of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction broke into pieces - at Baghdad's own expense.¹³⁵ According to a report by the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the value of arms transfers to Iraq between 1984 and 1988 exceeded \$29 billion.¹³⁶ In accordance with UN resolutions Iraq is obliged to pay billions of dollars in reparation for damages caused by the invasion of Kuwait. Most expensive of all, of course, has been the human cost. Thousands of young

¹³¹ A. Baram, 'The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait: Decision Making in Baghdad' in *Amatazia Baram and Barry Rubin (eds), Iraq's Road to War* (London: MacMillan, 1993), pp. 26-28.

¹³² Sa'ad Al-Bazzaz's book, *Al-Jeneralat Akhir Man Ya'lam (The Generals Are the Last to Know)* (London: Dar Al-Hikmah, 1994) is devoted almost entirely to the discussion of this issue.

¹³³ Al-Samarra'i, *Destroyer*, pp. 225-27.

¹³⁴ Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein: A Political Biography* (London: Brassey's, 1991), p. 226.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

Iraqis were consigned to death at the fronts in Kurdistan, along the Iraqi-Iranian borders, in Kuwait and indeed in the prisons and concentration camps throughout the country.

The historical development of the modern state of Iraq points to a number of unmistakable features:

1. Political violence, whether by the ruling regime or opposition groups, is a common phenomenon, while peaceful opposition is not part of the political tradition of the country.
2. Opposition groups including Kurds, Communists, Arab nationalists, Shi'a fundamentalists, etc., have close ties with foreign powers, whether Arab (e.g. Nasser's Egypt), regional (Iran) or international (the USSR and the Eastern bloc).
3. Although the Iraqis have developed a tradition of opposing foreign domination (the Ottomans, then the British), no political tradition for opposing ruling regimes has evolved.

While it is now commonplace to refer to the regime of Saddam Hussein as being unmatched in Iraq's history, the fact is that Saddam Hussein's regime is not a new phenomenon in Iraqi politics:

The methods Saddam Hussein has used, some of the values he espouses and the political logic of the system that he has established in Iraq have all been prefigured in previous regimes to varying degrees. Indeed, in many ways they epitomise some of the distinctive characteristics of the Iraqi state itself, as process and as structure.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Details of purchases and suppliers are given in Henderson, *Instant Empire*, pp. 174ff.

¹³⁷ Tripp, *History of Iraq*, p. 194.

Chapter 2: The Political, Religious, Racial and Class Map of Modern Iraq

This chapter aims at providing a general background to the Iraqi scene, in the hope that it will throw some light upon the condition of the society in which Iraqi political opposition developed. Attention will be paid to the socio-economic factors at work in Iraqi political life and to their impact on the opposition movement as a whole. This is so that the political behaviour of the opposition may be better understood and new insights into Iraqi politics yielded. However, the accent of the discussion will be on the racial, religious, ethnic and sectarian diversity and the impact of this diversity on the political development of the state. The sectarian Sunni-Shi'a rivalry will be discussed in some detail as this rivalry has substantially escalated since the Ba'thists seized power in 1968.

In his *A Study in the Nature of the Society of Iraq*, Ali Al-Wardi relates an interesting story about Alexander the Great. The emperor is rumoured to have complained to his tutor, Aristotle, that he found it extremely difficult to govern the unruly Mesopotamians and that he was considering exterminating all the inhabitants of the Land Between the Two Rivers in order to put an end to the countless troubles they were making. According to this legend, Aristotle replied that such a course of action would be fruitless: "Even if you succeed in killing all of them, you will not change the air in that region which infused them with that nature and gave them their traits. Besides", said the philosopher, "after their death, don't you know that whoever comes to live in that region will surely acquire the same qualities and behave the same way".¹³⁸ The story, as Al-Wardi notes, is probably a fabrication. Nevertheless it is

¹³⁸ Ali Al-Wardi, *Dirasa Fi Tabiy'at Al-Mujtama' Al-Iraqi (A Study in the Society of Iraq)* (Tehran:

often cited to indicate that the rebellious spirit and discontented and unruly nature of the Iraqis go as far back as the days of Alexander.

There are of course a number of factors which made Iraq, perhaps more than any other country in the Middle East, a significant seat of political turmoil, agitation and repression in that part of the world. In order to explain this 'phenomenon', it has become almost axiomatic, especially among scholars with Shi'a sympathies, to assert that the country has, since its creation, suffered from a most serious disease which has been plaguing its political scene and which has caused an ever widening gulf between ruler and ruled. That disease is the monopoly of power by a minority which has consistently resorted to the threat and, indeed, brutal use of force in order to impose itself on the majority of the people.¹³⁹

Sunni Arab hegemony in modern Iraq, was for a number of reasons, both historical and expedient. When the Sunni Ottomans ruled Iraq, most administrative posts were almost exclusively entrusted to fellow-Sunnis. This biased attitude strengthened and entrenched the Sunnis not only in the government machinery but also in other vital areas of Iraqi public life. Following the defeat of the Ottomans in Iraq, the new rulers, the British, found it expedient to employ the functionaries of the ancient regime on whom they could rely to run the affairs of the newly created state. In short, the power wielded by the Arab Sunnis has always been much greater than their proportion would entitle them. It is therefore understandable why the majority of Iraqis, be they Shi'as, Kurds or other ethnic or religious groups, feel estranged from the domain of the state and grow up full of contempt and suspicion for everything that whiffed of

Intisharat Al-Maktabah Al-Haidariya, 1996), p. 366.

the central government. This hostile attitude to what is often seen as a Sunni institution is often reflected in the readiness of the non-Sunni Arabs to embrace revolutionary ideologies and support opposition movements and parties. The proportion of the non-Sunni Arab Iraqis in opposition has, since the creation of the modern state, been much higher than their actual proportion in society and many of the militant movements have, as Batatu points out, been led by non-Sunnis.¹⁴⁰

It is now commonplace to say that until the turn of the century "the Iraqis were not one people or one political community"¹⁴¹ and that in this unstable country the only stable phenomena are sectarianism and factionalism.¹⁴² Like Lebanon, but on a much larger scale, Iraqi society is characterised by deeply rooted differences which run along social, religious, ethnic and linguistic lines. It is composed of sizeable and distinct groups. On the social and cultural levels, there are the urbanites and the tribal communities, each with its own ideals and code of ethics and attitudes. Like the inhabitants of many of the Middle Eastern states, which were mapped out by Britain and France, and in the absence of any real identification with a nation state, the Iraqis continued to "identify with their immediate social units, such as kin, sect, tribe, village, town or quarter".¹⁴³

The immense economic and political changes which have been at work in Iraq throughout much of the twentieth century makes the task of providing a concrete

¹³⁹ Al-Uzri, *The problem of Government*, p. 345.

¹⁴⁰ Among other things, Batatu studies the revolutionary movements in Iraq including the Communist, People's and Ba'th Parties from this angle and provides detailed percentages and biographical data relating to the leadership of both parties. Batatu, *Social Classes*, pp. 422, 424ff.

¹⁴¹ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 13.

¹⁴² Hassn Al-Alawi, *Al-Shi'a Wa Al-Dawla Al-Qawmmiya 1914-1990 (The Iraqi Shi'a and the State 1914-1990)* (London: Dar Al-Zawra', 1990), p. 11.

¹⁴³ Peter Sluglett and Marion Farouk-Sluglett, "Sunnis and Shi'as Revisited: Sectarianism and Ethnicity in Authoritarian Iraq", in Hopwood, et al (eds), *Power and Society*, p. 75.

analysis of class, in the words of Hanna Batatu who attempted to do just that, “an extremely difficult undertaking”.¹⁴⁴ The dislocations and social upheaval which came as a result of strategies instituted by the governments of Ba’thist Iraq, or of a protracted state of war be it against Iran, the international coalition or the Kurds accelerated the rate at which the social map has changed. There were other factors which contributed to changes in Iraqi society. These include :

the rapid build up of monarchic state institutions, the world-wide depression of 1929, the land settlement policies of 1932 and 1938, the severe shortages and the spiral inflation during the Second World War and in the immediate post-war years, the mass exodus of the Jews in the late forties and fifties, the sudden inpouring of oil money after 1952, and the fourfold increase of the population of Baghdad between 1922 and 1957 - there were comparatively swift movements into and out of the [social] classes. There were also abrupt shifts within them in an upward or downward direction. In these movements and shifts were involved not only individuals and families, but whole groups.¹⁴⁵

Population

The population of modern Iraq grew from 3.5 million in 1932 to 6.3 million in 1957 and to 16.2 million in 1987. “It is estimated that today [1994], it stands at 22 million, more than 70 per cent of whom dwell in urban areas”.¹⁴⁶ However, despite the facade of “civilisation” - tall buildings, super highways and the like, Iraqi society is still responsive to a number of social and cultural forces which pull at it in every direction. This multi-faceted tension is not unique to Iraq. All societies pass through such phases at one point or other. But what distinguishes the Iraqi experience is its

¹⁴⁴ Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and Its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 5.

¹⁴⁵ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁶ *Taqreer Wazarat Al-Takhtit Hawla Anmat Al-Nummu Al-Sukkani fi Al-Iraq (Ministry of Planning Report on Patterns of Population Growth in Iraq)*, (Baghdad: Ministry of Planning, 1994).

intensity and its far-reaching consequences. The bloody struggle to maintain power and indeed monopolise it, especially following the 1968 coup, which brought Saddam Hussein to power, has left its stamp on the racial map of the country. The forced eviction of Kurds particularly along the Iraq-Iran border, the massive Christian emigration to the West in the late eighties and early nineties, the deportation of thousands of Iraqis of Persian extraction have all had their mark, not only on the composition of the Iraqi society, but also on their sense of nationhood and belonging.

Bedouin vs. Urban

Generally speaking, the Iraqis have been living under 'two conflicting sets of social values: the Bedouin values which come from the adjacent deserts, and the civilised values emanating from its ancient civilisations'.¹⁴⁷ According to Iraq's prominent sociologist Ali Al-Wardi, the Iraqis may be described as a "bewildered people in that two roads in opposite directions lie before them but they are obliged to take both roads at the same time. Unable to do so, they feel compelled to take one road for a time, only to get back and take the other at another time". Bedouinism, which is the complete antithesis of urban, Western-defined civilisation, has its own ideals and values that are deeply rooted in the traditions, attitudes and practices dictated by the desert. For bedouinism is in fact "synonymous with the desert and it would be difficult for nations that do not inhabit deserts to adopt bedouinism as a social system".¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Al-Wardi, *Study in the Society*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

The basic difference between civilisation as it is known in the developed world and bedouinism is that bedouinism averts and abhors authority, in any form or shape, especially that of the central government and indeed that of the state as a whole, while at the same time it tends to attach great importance to tribalism and the sense of belonging to one's own clan or tribe. To the Bedouin, the central government is nothing but an "apparatus the main duty of which is oppression and tax collection". On the other hand, the Bedouin's tribe, clan or extended family is seen to be the ultimate refuge and safe haven. Furthermore, while the Bedouins feel it is shameful and indeed dishonourable to be subjected to the state to which they also have to pay taxes, they consider raiding and looting to be acts of valour, deserving praise and respect. This refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of the state is at the heart of the Bedouin social culture. Another aspect of bedouinism is the low regard with which it views people who earn a living through a specific craft or occupation. Al-Wardi points out that the Arabic word *mihna* which means "occupation" or "profession" is derived from the same roots of *imtahana* which means to "despise and disrespect".¹⁴⁹

Despite the fact that the central government in Iraq has, over the last half century or so, succeeded in spreading the rule of "law and order" over much of the land, most Iraqis have not yet overcome the old Bedouin attitude characterised by suspicion and distrust towards government. This attitude is so deeply etched in the national consciousness of the Iraqis that it will not be easy to change it. Al-Wardi asserts that most modern Iraqis still live under the influence of tribalism, which considers it a dishonour to appeal to the government for help. This course of action is widely considered as "unmanly" and runs counter to the ideals of independence, courage and

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

challenge. Bedouins prefer to take the law into their own hands rather than enlist the help of the judiciary or the police.¹⁵⁰

From the fall of Baghdad in 1258, and for a number of historical reasons related to the hegemony of foreign invaders over their country, the Iraqis developed a hostile attitude towards their rulers, which developed into a “psychological complex”. While Bedouin culture rejects and condemns such qualities as arrogance, haughtiness and aloofness, the Iraqis found themselves in a position where they had to live with these abhorred traits and even show respect to those arrogant superiors and government officials who insisted on being treated as masters. This led most people to adopt a defence mechanism, which may be described as a hypocritical attitude towards their government. A damaging effect of the complex relationship between ruler and ruled was the emergence of a certain set of values in which arrogance was associated with government - that is strong and effective government. Humility, on the other hand, became an indication of weakness.¹⁵¹

The Social Scene:

The Mallaks

When the British conquered Iraq, they found it expedient to cultivate good relationships with this privileged and influential class in what was then mostly a rural society: the tribal chiefs (*sheikhs*) and the land owners (*mallaks*). The latter are to be found in the cultivable land in the upper mid-Euphrates, the Khalis area and lower Diyala and in the fertile tracts between Kirkuk and Mosul. The conquerors relied on

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 312-12.

this landed class in no small measure for the administration of the countryside, as the occupation forces were particularly cost-conscious and wanted to keep expenditure to a minimum.

To illustrate the influence wielded by this social class we have to remember that in 1958 in the province of Kut, for example 22 people held 82% of *Tapu* land and 49 people 73% of *Lazma* land.¹⁵² The landed class of society was also used as a possible counterpoise to the King in case he deviated from the prescribed course of British policy. Batatu points out that the British administration was also interested in the landowners and sheikhs, who might one day prove useful,¹⁵³ against the urban dwellers who were more politically conscious.¹⁵⁴

But the landed class did not in fact constitute a homogeneous whole because they differed in their class positions, their status, values and social functions. This is true of the Arab sheikhs as well as their counterparts, the Kurdish *aghas*, who also dominated great numbers of peasants. While the big land owners were readily identified with the British policies in Iraq, the smaller sheikhs in such mid-Euphrates areas as Shammiya and Hindiyya were on the whole sympathetic to the ambitions of their tribesmen and some even participated in the 1920 Revolt and subsequent uprisings against the pro-British monarchy.

Nuri Sa'id was quick to capitalise on the power of this class and when he founded his *Hizb Al-Itihad Al-Dustouri* (Constitutional Union Party) in 1949, 17 sheikhs and

¹⁵² *Tapu* and *Lazma* involved 'a conditional alienation of state land to individuals, the right of ownership being in theory by the state, the land reverting to it if not used, in the case of *tapu* for at least three years and in the case of *lazma* for at least four years. However both were heritable tenures and both could be transferred by sale to other individuals'. See Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 55.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

aghas were among the "the higher Committee" of the party which numbered only forty-six persons.¹⁵⁵ Following the 1958 coup however the power and status of the sheikhs and mallaks were undermined by a series of legislations, which aimed at stripping them of their land.

The Peasants

The peasants who tilled the lands are particularly concentrated in the flow-irrigation regions in central and southern Iraq, rather than in the rain-fed areas. Generally speaking, before the 1968 coup they lived in a scattered manner and at some distance from the fields in which they toiled. In short they led a miserable life in mud or mat huts with their cows or buffaloes, surrounded by refuse and often visited by disease. Their luxuries in life, as Batatu points out, did not go beyond a little tea and sugar, the drink which had since World War I replaced dates as an after-meals sweet.¹⁵⁶ High protein and nutritive foodstuffs were not known to them. Since it was widely felt that the land tenure system, often referred to in post-1958 Iraq as the "feudal system"¹⁵⁷ was behind the privation and misery of this class, economic planners in Republican Iraq embarked on a stringent agrarian reform programme. The new laws took away the land from the sheikhs and landowners, albeit against some sort of compensation, and gave it almost free to their peasants, in a serious, but as it turned out fruitless attempt, to raise their standard of living. The peasants lacked the necessary funds required for farming the land. Worse still, the government did nothing to liberate the

¹⁵⁴ Batatu, *Social Classes*, pp. 88-9,

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹⁵⁷ Khadduri, *Socialist Iraq*, p. 117.

water supply which was left in the hands of the old owners of the land who, naturally enough, made sure that they kept all the land adjacent to rivers and canals.¹⁵⁸

The Working Class

The working class, which had grown gradually during the monarchist regime, was in a relatively better shape than the peasants. They became more involved in the political developments of the country, following the establishment of the Communist Party in 1934. With their allies the students, the working class participated in the *Wathba* and *Intifada* of 1948 and 1952 respectively. The founder of the Communist Party, Yusuf Salman Yusuf better known as Fahad, himself a worker, succeeded in securing a following among the urban workers so much so that the working class may be said to have drifted to the left in the forties and fifties as a result of his organisational skills.¹⁵⁹ Favourable legislation was introduced to improve the lot of the rapidly increasing working class by successive Republican governments. These measures included in 1964 the offering to state workers of shares in the profits of the nationalised industries. At present, there are what might be described as two working classes in Iraq. Those who work in the public sector are government employees and are treated as part of the civil service, while those who work in the private sector may be called workers and are treated as such by the relevant trade unions.

The Middle Class

Expansion of the school system, particularly during the latter years of the monarchy, helped to expand the middle class and enhance its stature and influence. This class is

¹⁵⁸ Salah Hammoudi, "Al-Islah Al-Zirae Fil Iraq: Ma Lahu Wa Ma Alaih (Agrarian Reform in Iraq: Pros and Cons)", *Al-Jumhuriya*, 2 August 1978, p. 7.

made of a medley of what Batatu calls a people with "middling" incomes such as tradesmen, small landowners, members of professions, civil servants as well as military officers. More politically conscious and public spirited than the other classes, the middle class produced the political as well as the military leaders who were to play significant parts in the history of modern Iraq. For it was this class that caused most of the agitation which Iraq witnessed towards the end of the monarchy and was chiefly responsible for staging the numerous coups in Iraq between 1933 and 1968. While the monarchy gave the middle class stature, it did not ensure a middle-class income to them. Not known for their altruism, the military middle class in Iraq resorted through salary increases and lavish allowances to enhance their position in society. The civil counterparts of the military middle class, the salaried government employees and a large segment of the private sector lived just above the poverty line before 1968, after which the state attempted to redress the situation through legislation which included pay rises and income tax exemption. By 1980, their situation had improved a great deal and the national income in Iraq shifted in favour of this class.¹⁶⁰

The Shi'a

Statistics on the ethnic distribution of Iraqis are either not available or deliberately inaccurate. Lest they prove to be an embarrassment, successive governments of Iraq have always been reluctant to publish figures and statistics relating to ethnic or religious divisions. With the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war in 1980, publication of the

¹⁵⁹ Batatu, *Social Classes*, pp. 485ff.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1127

Annual General Statistics was discontinued as it was felt that it might contain information of strategic value.

Ethnically, Iraqi society is made up of an Arab majority who are thought to constitute approximately four fifths of the population, and Kurds who make up just under twenty per cent. There are also the Turkomans and other minorities such as the Assyrians, Armenians, Persians, Chaldeans, Sabeans, Yazidis and others.¹⁶¹

As far as division along religious lines is concerned, the vast majority of the Iraqis are Muslims who are thought to constitute almost 95% of the population. Besides them there exist some of the oldest sects in Christianity. Today, those constitute perhaps less than two per cent of the population.¹⁶² But the deepest division in Iraqi society is that which splits the Muslims of Iraq, whether Arabs, Kurds or Turkomans, into Shi'as and Sunnis.

When the Prophet Muhammad's cousin Ali, the fourth caliph died in A. D. 661, his oldest son Hasan relinquished any claim to the caliphate in deference to Muawiya Bin Abi Sufiyan. But when Muawiya died, his son Yezid claimed the throne to which he was challenged by Ali's second son, Hussein. The resultant battle ended with the death of Hussein and his followers in 680 in the Iraqi city of Karbala which has since come to be regarded as a holy Shi'a city. The Muslims who continued to support the cause of Ali and his descendants came to be known as 'Shi'a' (Ar. the 'followers', 'party') of Ali. As the vast majority of Ali's followers were Iraqis, who fought against what they considered an attempt on the part of the Ummayed rulers of Syria to

¹⁶¹ Azri, Al-, Abdul-Karim, *Mushkilat Al-Hukm Fi Al-Iraq (The Problem of Governing Iraq)* (London: [Dar Al-Al-Hikma, 1991]), p. 343.

¹⁶² Batatu., *Social Classes*, p. 40; see also. A-Alawi, *Iraqi Shi'a*, p. 41.

impose their hegemony, a political dimension to the Shi'a movement was thus introduced from the very start.

Contrary to popular belief, Shi'aism originated not in Iran but in Iraq.¹⁶³ However, most Iraqi Shi'as are recent converts.¹⁶⁴ Shi'aism in Iraq first acquired a political dimension during the seventh century, following the murder of Hussein, son of Ali Ibn Abi Talib at the hands of the army sent by Yezid, Mua'awiya's son. What aggravated the alienation and bitterness felt by the Shi'as and deepened even further the Sunni-Shi'a rift, however, was the conflict over Iraq between the Sunni Ottomans and their Shi'a adversaries, the Persians.¹⁶⁵ This conflict, which further politicised and polarised both Shi'as and Sunnis, started during the reign of the Safavid Shah Ismael who converted to Shi'aism towards the end of the sixteenth century. Following a series of military victories, he forced his subjects to convert to Shi'aism. This, however, does not mean that no Shi'as existed before Shah Ismael in Iran. Shi'as were known to have lived in the cities of Qum and Nisapur before the establishment of the Safavid dynasty. In 1508 Shah Ismael invaded Iraq and embarked upon a systematic policy of persecution towards the Sunnis. His soldiers are said to have killed Sunni scholars and destroyed their shrines particularly those of Abu Hanifah and Abdul Qadir Al-Gailani.¹⁶⁶

Contemporaneous with Ismael was Sultan Selim, known also to the Europeans as Selim the Grim. Selim won this title for having shown himself to be violent and ruthless in his dealings not only with his adversaries but also with his own immediate

¹⁶³ Abdulla Fahad Al-, Nafisi, *Dawr Al-Shi'a Fi Tatawur Al-Iraq Al-Siyasi Al-Hadith (The Role of the Shi'a in the Development of Modern Iraq)* (Beirut: Dar Al-Nahar, 1973), pp. 3-4.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁵ Al-Uzri, *Problems of Government*, p. 346.

family. When Selim heard of the atrocities committed by Ismael, he soon appointed himself champion of the Sunnis and ordered the murder of the Shi'as within the Empire.

Upon Selim's death, his son Suleiman ascended to the throne. Suleiman, known as the Magnificent, was quite different from his father. Upon wresting Iraq from the Persians in 1534, he did not even attempt to avenge himself on the Shi'as. Instead he did what he could to refurbish all holy shrines, Sunni and Shi'a as well. This wise policy however was not to last long. In 1623, the Safavid Abbas managed to retake Iraq. With this reconquest, the Sunnis were mercilessly treated and severely prosecuted as "hundreds of thousands" of Sunnis [were] massacred and "thousands" of others sold into slavery.¹⁶⁷ A few years later, however, the Ottoman Murad IV reconquered Iraq, only to treat the Shi'as the way his Persian predecessor had treated the Sunnis, and his troops were said to have slaughtered "about 30 000 victims, mostly Persians".¹⁶⁸ While still under Ottoman rule, Iraq was always under threat from the Persians, who frequently effected successful campaigns against this part or that along the extremely long borders between Persia and Iraq. It was therefore inevitable that the Iraqi Sunnis would come to view the Ottomans as their defenders and liberators while the Shi'as on the other hand felt the same thing towards the Persians. This also meant that even when Iraq was not involved, as soon as war broke out between the two competing empires, the Iraqis would find themselves divided into supporters and opposition, each sect hoping its champion would win. Indeed followers of these two sects often

¹⁶⁶ Al-Nafisi, *The Role of the Shi'a*, p. 49.

¹⁶⁷ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 15.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

engaged in “wars of words which frequently developed into recriminations and accusations of treason and apostasy”.¹⁶⁹

As far as the Arab world of today is concerned, with the possible exception of the tiny Gulf state of Bahrain¹⁷⁰, Iraq is the only Arab country in the Middle East with a Shi’a majority. Although there are no recent statistics to prove it, this is now commonly accepted even by the Sunnis themselves.

Estimates, however, vary. In his *The Iraqi Shi’a and the State 1914-1990*, Hassan Al-Alawi points out that according to the British-organised 1919 census, the Arab Shi’as constituted 55% of the total population of Iraq, while the Sunnis constituted only 19% of the Arab population.¹⁷¹ Yitzhak Nakash speaks of the Shi’as as forming 56 % of the Iraqi population in 1932 while Abdul-Karim Al-Uzdi asserts that the Shi’as in 1947 made up 59. 5% of the total population against 19. 7% for the Sunni Arabs.¹⁷² Overall, it is estimated that today about ninety-five per cent of the population is Muslim. “The Kurds account for between fifteen per cent and twenty per cent of the Muslim population, the Sunni Arabs for about twenty-five per cent, and the Shi’as for the rest, about fifty-five percent.... The remaining five per cent are Christians, Yazidis and Sabeans”.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ Ali Al-Wardi, *A Study*, p. 130.

¹⁷⁰ The majority of the Yemenis, particularly in the North are Zaidis who though classified as Shiis are quite different from mainstream Shi’asm in a number of fundamental issues chief among which is that unlike the rest of the Shiis they do not consider the first three caliphs as usurpers of power. See *Al-Mawsou’a Al-Muyassara Fi Al-Adyan wa Al-Mathahib Al-Mu’asirah (Encyclopaedia of Religions and Contemporary Beliefs)* (Riyadh: Al-Safeer Printing House, 1988), p. 259.

¹⁷¹ Al-Alawi, *Iraqi Shi’as*, p. 45.

¹⁷² Hamid Al-Bayati, *Shi’at Al-Iraq Baina Al-Ta’ifiya Wa Al-Shubuhah (The Shi’a of Iraq Between Sectarianism and Suspicion)* (London, Al-Rafid:1997), p. 51.

¹⁷³ Peter Sluglett and Marion Farouk-Sluglett, “Sunnis and Shi’as Revisited”, p. 76.

With a few exceptions, the Iraqi Shi'as adhere to Imami Shi'ism, also referred to as the "Twelvers". The latter name is based on the belief that the only Imams who were qualified enough to lead the Muslims were the fourth Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib and his eleven descendants, of whom Muhammad Al-Mahdi Ibn Al-Hassan Al-Askari is believed to have vanished from Samarra to appear at a later time.¹⁷⁴ Among their most fundamental articles of faith is the belief that the choice of the *Imam* (the leader: spiritual and temporal) is too important to be left to laymen or even religious men to decide. The incumbent Imam must name his successor and it is the duty of all Shi'as to heed the word of the 'infallible', for according to the Shi'as, the Imam is above error. In this connection they cite Prophet Muhammad's specific mention of Ali bin Abi Talib as his successor during what has come to be known as the Ghadeer Day. They further refer to Ali bin Abi Talib's naming of his two sons Al-Hassan and Al-Hussein as his successors.¹⁷⁵

Since the disappearance of the twelfth Imam whose "second coming" is still being awaited by the Shi'a faithful, the highest religious authority among the Muslim Shi'as is temporarily invested in a religious personage known as Al-Mujtehid Al-Akbar (The Greatest Scholar), who is seen as the lawful representative of the (vanished or absent) Imam. It is within the Mujtehid's power to issue fatwas (religious decrees) on any weighty question deemed of significance to the protection of the interests of the Shi'a

¹⁷⁴*Encyclopaedia of Religions*, p. 301. The Imams are in chronological order ; 1. Ali bin Abi Talib, 2. Al-Hassan bin Ali, 3. Al-Hussein bin Ali, 4. Ali Zein Al-Abideen bin Al-Hussein, 5. Muhammad Al-Baqir bin Ali Zein Al-Abideen, 6. Ja'ffar Al-Sadiq bin Muhammad Al-Baqir, 7. Musa Al-Kadhim bin Ja'far Al-Sadiq, 8. Ali Al-Ridha bin Musa Al-Kadhim, 9. Muhammad Al-Jawad bin Ali Al-Ridha, 10. Ali Al-Hadi bin Muhammad Al-Jawad, 11. Al-Hassan Al-Askari bin Ali Al-Hadi, 12. Muhammad Al-Mahddi bin Al-Hassan Al-Askari.

¹⁷⁵ Al-Nafisi, *the Role of the Shi'a*, pp. 22ff.

body-politic.¹⁷⁶ Theoretically, the deciding factors in determining the superiority of one Mujtehid over another are his breadth of knowledge, piety and probity. In reality however, the Mujtehid's own social intelligence and his ability to command a following and enhance his popularity through such tactics as winning over the wealthy and influential have become more decisive in securing leadership.¹⁷⁷

Dissembling

One of the most important aspects of Shi'aism, which has had a lasting impact on the conditions of the Shi'a in Iraq, is their belief in and practice of *Taqqiyah* (Ar. Dissembling). Shi'a vitriolic criticism of the mainstream Sunni jurisprudence, rituals and traditions of Islam, and their uncritical bias towards Ali bin Abi Talib won them considerable antagonism across the Islamic world. *Taqqiyah* was therefore a defence mechanism, which the Shi'as felt compelled to use in order to escape danger.

Dissembling, which was at first resorted to as a necessity, developed with the passage of time into an article of faith, which must be adhered to until the "reappearance" of the twelfth Imam. Those who abandon *Taqqiyah* before then stand accused of committing a sacrilegious act. The Shi'as base their concept of *Taqqiyah* on a Qura'nic verse which calls upon all believers not to take disbelievers for their friends in preference to believers: "Whoso doeth that hath no connection with Allah unless (it be) that ye but guard yourselves against them, taking (as it were) security".¹⁷⁸ Shi'a clerics also quote their fifth Imam, Jaafar Al-Sadiq as having said: "Dissembling is my

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁷ Nakash, *The Shiis of Iraq*, p. 209.

¹⁷⁸ *The Meaning of the Glorious Qura'n*, trans. Muhammad M. Pickthall (New York: The Muslim World League, 1977), Sura: Al-Imran, verse 28.

religion and the religion of my ancestors. Those who do not dissemble have no faith".¹⁷⁹

Taqqiya quickly developed from a device to avoid religious persecution into a political weapon through which the Shi'as endeavoured to mask their activities and cover up their ambition of 'redressing' their injuries and restoring what they saw as their inalienable right to power. It is for this reason that the Shi'as of Iraq were often under suspicion of being disloyal to those in authority even when they go out of their way to show their allegiance. In this respect, *Taqqiya* may be said to be a futile weapon, which could inflict pain upon those who employ it. An ironic reflection on the state of affairs in Iraq may be seen in the fact that the population of the Shi'a governorates would much prefer a Sunni Muhafidh (Governor) to a Shi'a, as the central Sunni dominated government would characteristically view any demand submitted by a Shi'a official on behalf of his constituency as suspect and is therefore more likely to be rejected or thoroughly investigated, conditions, on the other hand, could be improved more quickly if such petitions or demands are taken up by a Sunni Governor since his loyalty to the regime is normally not in question.

Najaf: Centre of Shi'a Culture and Politics

The four most sacred Shi'a shrine cities: Najaf, Karbala, Samarra and Kazumain are all in Iraq. Of these four, the most prominent is Najaf, approximately 200 kilometres south-West of Baghdad, which came to play an increasingly important political role not only in Iraq but in Shi'a affairs throughout the world. Founded in A. D. 1002, Najaf has, since the fall of the Safavid dynasty in 1736, been the seat of world

¹⁷⁹ *Encyclopaedia of Religions*, p. 302.

Shi'aism and despite the fevered attempts by successive Sunni regimes in Baghdad to undermine its status, it remains to this day the "Vatican" of Shi'as across the world.¹⁸⁰ It is the fourth holiest city in Islam after Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem.¹⁸¹ An indication of its significance as the centre of world Shi'aism may be shown by the fact that most of the leaders of the Islamic Revolution in Iran including Khomeini, Rafsanjani and others were either educated in this city or spent several years there.

The special status of Najaf was grudgingly recognised by the Ottomans who despite their prejudice against the Shi'a, had to treat Najaf in a special way. It is said that when Sultan Murad first entered the city he did so barefooted as a sign of respect for Imam Ali bin Abi Talib. With the passage of time, and as Ottoman control over the territories under their rule slipped during the final stage of the empire, Najaf became the base from which religious and political opposition to the Ottomans was launched. For this holy city, perhaps more than any other in Iraq, had always considered Ottoman rule to be unjust and unlawful.

In modern times, rebellion against the Ottomans reached a crescendo in June 1915 when the Najafis expelled the representative of the Ottoman government together with all his entourage. From then until well after the fall of Baghdad, Najaf was governed by Al-Mujtehid Al-Akbar (the Great Mujtehid, Scholar).¹⁸² When, in 1918, the British

¹⁸⁰ The situation became quite complicated after the eruption of the Iraq-Iran War in 1980 as the Iranian and other Shi'a clerics were denied entry to Iraq during the conflagration. Clandestine relations however were maintained with all Shi'a centres in the world *including* the Iranian holy city of Qum, Khomeini's power base.

¹⁸¹ Al-Nafisi, *The Role of the Shi'a*, p. 48.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, p. 48.

attempted to increase control of the city, the Najafis rebelled yet again and killed Captain Marshall who was in charge of security in the city.¹⁸³

The establishment of the Iraqi state in the early twenties and the emergence of Baghdad as its hub, both politically and commercially, inevitably led to the decline of Najaf which had enjoyed what Yitzhak Nakash calls a "semi autonomous status".¹⁸⁴ It found it "increasingly difficult to command the focus of identity of the Shi'as in the new state". Although still occupying a special place in Shi'a consciousness not only in Iraq but throughout the Shi'a world, Najaf now wields less political power than it did under the monarchy and after. The British first, and the Baghdad government later, embarked upon the task of undermining the power base of the Najaf Mujtehids by strengthening the position of the local administrative apparatus first and winning them over by paying them handsome sums for their services.

In later years even those charged with looking after the Shi'a shrines became government employees. As the new state possessed all instruments of power it imposed a number of restrictions aimed at weakening the status of Najaf and Karbala. These measures included, among other things, tight supervision and control of pilgrimage, corpse traffic and the flow of aid from the outside world, restricting the Muharram observances and the imposition of tight controls on the syllabi of the Shi'a educational institutions.¹⁸⁵ Commenting on the efforts exerted by the Sunni governments to isolate the Shi'a Mujtehids and separate religion from politics, Yizhak Nakash writes:

¹⁸³ Nakash, *The Shi'as*, p. 94.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 271.

The Sunni state reduced the areas of influence of the Shi'a Mujtehids in Iraq, and its ability to curtail the activity of the Shi'a clergy was nowhere more evident than in its success in limiting the size of their constituency by stopping the spread of Shi'aism in the country. In 1927 Shi'a emissaries were arrested near Kirkuk while attempting to convert Turkoman villagers to Imami Shi'aism. ... In blocking any further spread of Shi'aism in Iraq, the government was able to end the process of conversion, which had taken place in the country mainly during the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁶

Since Iran became the bastion of political Shi'aism, it exercised an increasing influence on the social life of neighbouring Iraq, particularly in Najaf and the other Shi'a shrine cities. The yearly pilgrimage to the Shi'a shrines in Iraq, attendance of the prestigious schools particularly those in Najaf¹⁸⁷, and the constant flow of donations to the Shi'a clergy enhanced Persian influence in the affairs of the Iraqi Shi'as especially as "most religious scholars in Iraq came to be either Persian or of Persian extraction".¹⁸⁸ This association of Shi'a clergy with Persia was associated with many of the atrocities committed against the Iraqi Shi'a Ulama in the name of defending national unity.

Conversion and Spread of Shi'aism in Iraq

Conversion to Shi'aism started during the mid-eighteenth century in Kufa where Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's cousin, is buried. With the settlement of the nomadic tribes in that fertile region, Shi'aism spread from that city into the mid-Euphrates to the inhabitants of the alluvial plains of the neighbouring country.¹⁸⁹ Conversion to

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁸⁷ An indication of the extent of Persian presence in the Shii centres in Iraq may be seen in the following statistics which show the origin and number of students enrolled in the Najaf schools in 1957: Bahrain, Al-Hasa and Al-Qatif (20 students), Syria and Lebanon (47), India and Kashmir (71), Tibet (270), Pakistan (324), Iraq (326), Iran (896). See Al-Nafisi, *The Role of the Shi'a*, p. 51.

¹⁸⁸ Al-Nafisi, *Role of the Shi'a*, p. 50.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

Shi'aism was beneficial to both the tribesmen as well as the urban communities of the shrine cities of Kufa and Najaf:

While the converted tribesmen were expected to refrain from internal disputes and to contribute forces for the protection of the shrine cities, the urban dwellers provided the tribesmen with access to markets and organised religion.¹⁹⁰

The process of conversion was intended, as Nakash argues, to lay the foundation of a Shi'a state in southern Iraq. Unlike the Wahhabiyya in Arabia and the Sanusiyya in Libya, this ambitious attempt was "aborted following the British occupation and the subsequent creation of a Sunni state in the country".¹⁹¹ However, conversion, especially of the tribes that settled near Najaf and Karbala because of their proximity to water and cultivable land and water, had an immense impact on the ratio of Sunnis to Shi'as in the country.¹⁹²

In spreading Shi'aism, the Mujtahids resorted to a number of tactics in which they attempted to beautify Shi'aism and present it in a positive light to their co-religionists. Among these was employment of religious propaganda which aimed at influencing the religious beliefs of the uneducated tribesmen. Travelling Shi'a *Mumens* (religious men) played a great part in winning over a number of large tribes, particularly in southern Iraq.¹⁹³ There were also those eloquent Shi'a poets and narrators who excelled in the art of moving their audience to tears while extolling the virtues of Hussein and his brothers and providing graphic details of what they suffered at the

¹⁹⁰ Nakash, *Shi'as of Iraq*, p. 5.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 269.

¹⁹³ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 42.

hands of their Ummawi adversaries.¹⁹⁴ The martyrdom of Hussein and his companions was the most important episode in the whole history of Shi'aism. It shaped Shi'a identity and served as a reminder of their struggle against those they considered to be the usurpers of their right to govern.¹⁹⁵

Another channel was employment, during the month of Muharram, of the *Mawakib Husseiniya* (passion plays of Hussein), which like the medieval mystery plays were performed in the streets, market places and public squares. It is to be recalled that Hussein was killed on the tenth of this month, hence the commemoration of this tragic event each Muharram. In these long processions, thousands of Shi'as march rhythmically thumping their breasts to mark Ashura, the day on which Hussein, his relatives and followers were all killed. On this annual occasion, black-clad men from all walks of life lash their backs with clusters of chains to mourn the death of the man they consider as a martyr fallen in the fight against injustice and despotism. Throughout these ceremonies drummers and singers chant mourning songs while some flagellate themselves as young men spray rosewater on the crowds or dish out free food, soft drinks and water. More extravagant than their Christian counterparts, those religious plays also contain highly emotive speeches that may be described as a combination of dirge and eulogy rendered by professional orators expert in the art of using highly charged and emotive language. The point of those processions is to "preserve the vitality of the symbol of Hussein and to propagate the Shi'a cause".¹⁹⁶

Immense attention was also paid to the holy shrines in Najaf, Kufa and Karbala where visitors, to this day, never fail to be awed by the sight of the gilded domes, imposing

¹⁹⁴ Al-Wardi, *A Study*, p. 236.

minarets, spacious courts, finest Persian rugs and the highly decorated mausoleums housing the descendants of the Prophet Muhammed.

Shi'a propaganda was quite effective because it played on the psychology of the desert dwellers and appealed to the tribal character of the nomadic and semi-nomadic Arabs who found their most cherished ideals of manhood, courage, sacrifice, honour and chivalry all embodied in the characters of Ali bin Abi Talib and his descendants. When for example Abbas, Hussein's brother, was cornered by his Umawi adversaries, he continued to fight chanting:

By God, even though you cut off my right hand I shall forever defend my religion and I shall [protect] an absolutely true Imam [Hussein] The grandson of the righteous and trustworthy Prophet.¹⁹⁷

These stories, which glorify martyrdom, are so effectively recited by the Shi'a *rawzakhoun* (readers) that they have a great psychological impact on their audience and provide them with a soothing outlet for their pent up grievances, repressed complaints and frustrations.¹⁹⁸

Until the early part of the twentieth century, the Shi'a and Sunnis did not intermarry. For even "in mixed cities they lived in separate quarters and led their own separate lives".¹⁹⁹ With the spread of literacy and education and, with the gradual secularisation of society, more people offered their daughters to suitors from across the denominational divide. Since the laws governing inheritance with regard to wives of the deceased are a good deal more generous among the Shi'a than those among

¹⁹⁵ Nakash, *The Shi'as of Iraq*, p. 142.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁹⁷ Quoted in Nakash, *The Shi'as of Iraq*, p. 145.

¹⁹⁸ Al-Wardi, *A Study*, p. 239.

¹⁹⁹ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 17.

the deceased are a good deal more generous among the Shi'a than those among Sunnis, many conservative Sunni parents did not mind giving their daughters in marriage to Shi'a men as Shi'a marriages promised better security for wives.²⁰⁰

Although the Ba'thist regime is determined to liquidate even the smallest pocket of dissent, under whatever guise it is expressed, the process of conversion to Shi'aism is still going on, albeit on a much smaller scale. The task of conversion is made relatively easy by the fact that the Iraqi tribesmen of today, like their ancestors before them, are intolerant of government - any government. To quote Batatu, their association of government with "oppression eased the task of the preachers and the transition to Shi'aism".²⁰¹

Despite the many shortcomings of the regimes which came to rule modern Iraq from its creation until the overthrow of General Qassim in 1963 there was positive change. Thanks to political prudence and perhaps even tolerance, "sectarian and factional barriers began if not to disappear, at least to become of less pressing political and social significance".²⁰² During these decades, less discrimination in Government service and the professions was evident. The years immediately before and after the creation of Israel in 1948 saw a significant strengthening of the Shi'as as an economic force as they began to occupy the empty places of the Jews who had emigrated to Palestine.²⁰³ This "Spring of the Shi'as" also witnessed the formation of two cabinets by Shi'a politicians; the first by Salih Jabr on 9 October 1947; the second by

²⁰⁰ Batatu ignores this important incentive and attributes this trend to the 'noticeable change' in the social situation of the Shi'as. See Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 47.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁰² Sluglett, *Sunnis and Shi'as*, p. 83

²⁰³ Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950*, p. 381.

Muhammad Al-Sadr on 29 January 1948.²⁰⁴ This however does not mean that the Sunni establishment was going to relinquish its claim to the helm. Among the compelling reasons why in 1947, and again in 1948, the Crown Regent asked Shi'a figures to form the cabinet was the introduction of new faces to tackle the grave political crisis caused by the government's intention to renew the 1922 Treaty with Britain. The appointment of Shi'a Prime Ministers however did not signify much, since power was normally exercised from behind the scenes. In more recent times Saddam Hussein resorted to this age-old tactic²⁰⁵ when in 1991, immediately after his defeat in the Gulf War and in the face of mounting opposition and rebellion throughout the Shi'a provinces, he appointed a Najafi Shi'a, Dr Sadoon Hammadi, as Prime Minister. Hammadi was followed by yet another Shi'a Prime Minister, Muhammed Hamza Al-Zubaidi, from the predominantly Shi'a city of Hilla in the district of Babylon.²⁰⁶

The Kurds

The Kurds, who are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims, speak Kurdish, a language more akin to Farsi than Arabic. The vast majority of the Kurds live in the districts of Duhawk, Suleimaniya and Arbil, which had belonged before the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire to the *Wilayah* (Province) of Mosul.²⁰⁷ The Shi'a Kurds, who make up a very small percentage of them, live in the areas adjacent to Iran particularly in the Wasit and Misan districts. Like other non-Turkish nationalities, the Kurds, encouraged

²⁰⁴ Al-Hasani, *Prime Ministers of Iraq*, pp. 331, 347.

²⁰⁵ Other Shi'a prime ministers in Iraq: Salih Jabr (November - December 1947), Fadhil Al-Jamali (March-April 1954), Abdul-Wahab Mirjan (December 1957-March 1958). See Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 182.

²⁰⁶ Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, pp. 83, 88.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

by the Treaty of Sevres of 1920 and the principles advocated by the U. S. President Woodrow Wilson, who sympathised with the claims of ethnic minorities, looked forward to the creation of a nation state of their own. Their aspirations however were frustrated, following the emergence of Turkey as a military power under Kemal Ataturk and the conclusion of the Treaty of Lausanne in which, in return for a number of concessions on the part of Turkey, the question of recognising Kurdish right to a state was dropped by the Allies.²⁰⁸

When World War I came to an end, the Kurdish areas of modern Iraq came under direct British rule. A local government however was soon formed to serve as a buffer zone between Turkey and Iraq. In the city of Suleimaniya, Sheikh Mahmud, assisted by *British* advisers was assigned the task of running the day-to-day business of the Kurdish area. It was agreed then that the Kurdish government should be supervised by the High Commissioner himself from Baghdad. Unwilling to play the part of a puppet, Sheikh Mahmud soon rebelled as he “refused to acquiesce in British rule”.²⁰⁹ For a few weeks between March and June 1919, his men were in control of most of the Kurdish Area.²¹⁰ But the situation went in favour of the British following an offensive which ended in the total defeat of the rebellious Kurds and the imprisonment of Sheikh Mahmud himself.

When Abdul Rahman Al-Naqib formed his first provisional government in 1920, no Kurd was assigned a cabinet post because sovereignty over the Kurdish areas had not been settled. The High Commissioner therefore continued to retain responsibility for

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁰⁹ Geoff Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 215.

²¹⁰ Farouq Abbas, *Resolution of Kurdish Problem*, pp. 16-17.

these areas. It was only after the signing of the 1922 Treaty between Iraq and Britain that the Britain annexed the Kurdish region to Iraq.

With this annexation, both the British and King Faisal reiterated, among other things, respect for the Kurds' right to use their mother tongue in schools, their pledge that no Arabs except technical staff would be assigned in that area and that Arabic would not be forced upon them. The attempts by Baghdad to impose central authority on the Kurdish people were met with vigorous resistance. The Kurds felt particularly resentful of the fact that the 1930 Treaty did not have any reference to the them. Many felt that Iraq's admission to the League of Nations had strengthened Baghdad's position. Following the example of King Faisal, the master of appeasement, successive governments tried to win over some of the Kurdish chieftains. A number of Kurdish politicians and military men began to occupy important as well as ceremonial government posts. Bakr Sidqi, leader of the first coup in the Arab world, to cite only one example, was himself a Kurd. But these attempts, as is evident in the de facto autonomy of the Kurdish region today, failed to quench the Kurds' thirst for self-rule, if not independence.

During the thirties and forties, the Barzani family played a significant role in inflaming nationalist zeal among the Kurds, although they started their struggle against Baghdad as tribal chieftains rather than nationalist leaders. The relations between the Kurds and the central government then went through an irregular ebb and flow which culminated, in 1945, in an all out war between Barazani's forces. Baghdad, assisted by the RAF and indirectly by Turkey (which closed its borders to

prevent fleeing Kurds from crossing the border) ²¹¹ managed to win the day forcing the escape of Mulla Mustafa Barzani together with six hundred of his followers across Iran and Turkey to seek refuge in the Soviet Union where he stayed until 1958.²¹²

Despite the intermittent confrontations, the Baghdad central government during the monarchy cannot be said to have adopted a ruthless policy towards the Kurds:

Despite all that is said against the monarchy, it was in point of fact a period in which the Kurds were enabled to use their national language and occupy important cabinet posts such as the Ministry of the Interior. Furthermore, Kurds sometimes became prime ministers. No restriction was imposed on their admission to Police, Military Academies or to any Higher Education Institution. ...Several army commanders came from Kurdish families. Unlike what happened in neighbouring countries or in Iraq at a later stage, There was no restriction of travel or movement inside or outside Iraq.²¹³

The military men who toppled the monarchy on 14 July 1958 were at first well disposed towards Kurdish aspirations and took a sympathetic attitude towards them.

²¹⁴ The three-man Presidency Council which assumed the role of head of state included a Sunni, a Shi'a and a Kurd. Furthermore Article 3 of the provisional Constitution of the Republic clearly indicates that Arabs and Kurds are partners whose national rights are recognised within the Iraqi state. Soon after the return of Mustafa Barzani and his colleagues from the Soviet Union after the 1958 coup, the political honeymoon ended and hostilities resumed when Qassim's regime could not meet all the demands of the Kurds.

²¹¹ Longrigg, *Iraq*, p. 327;

²¹² Geoff Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 301; P. & M. Farouk-Sluglett, *Sunnis and Shi'as*, p. 77.

²¹³ Farouq Abbas, *Resolution of the Kurdish Problem*, p. 32.

²¹⁴ P. & M. Farouk-Sluglett, *Sunnis and Shi'as*, p. 77.

Throughout the first Ba'thist and the two Arefs regimes there was much talk of Arab unity, more specifically a merger between Syria, Iraq and Nasser's Egypt. This undoubtedly estranged the Iraqi Kurds who feared that, if and when such a unity did materialise, their cause would then be lost in an Arab sea.²¹⁵ When the Ba'th seized power in 1968, they tried to settle all outstanding issues with the Kurds. After lengthy and arduous negotiations between the Ba'thists and the Kurdish leadership under Barzani the much vaunted Accord of March 1970 which granted the Kurds autonomous powers was signed. But it was soon discovered that the Accord, like 1975 Agreement between Saddam Hussein and the Shah of Iran, was a tactical move on the part of Baghdad intended primarily to gain time and regroup. On the other hand, seeking to take advantage Iraq's preoccupation with the war against Iran (1980-1988), the Kurds tried to score some victories in their region. Their moves were met with an iron fist which did not hesitate to attack them with chemical weapons. The "scale of the operations of 1988-89 and the apparent desire of the regime to exterminate the Kurdish population"²¹⁶ attests to what Geoff Simons calls "Saddam's perfidy".²¹⁷

Saddam Hussein's humiliating defeat in the Gulf War however afforded a better opportunity for the Kurds to realise their long cherished dream of self-rule. Although divided amongst themselves, the Kurds managed nevertheless to overrun most of the Kurdish areas and expel the demoralised Iraqi forces from Kurdish soil. Furthermore, the imposition on the Iraqi regime of the "no-fly" exclusion zone over the Kurdish areas helped the leaders of the major Kurdish parties: the Kurdish Democratic Party headed by Mulla Mustafa Barzani's son, Mas'oud and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

²¹⁵ Farouq Abbas, *Resolution of the Kurdish Problem*, p. 40.

²¹⁶ P. & M. Farouk-Sluglett, *Sunnis and Shi'as*, p. 78.

of Jalal Talbani to consolidate power and establish a de facto separate entity which still exists today.

The Turkomans

The Turkomans of Iraq are part of the Muslim Turkomans who now live in Turkmenistan and in neighbouring areas in Central Asia, with pockets found in Iraq and Syria. Like their Arab and Kurdish compatriots the Turkomans are also divided along sectarian lines. Those living in Tal A'far, Daquq, Tuz Khurmatu and Qara Tappa are Shi'a, while those in Altoun Kopri, and Kifri are Sunni.²¹⁸

Following the breakdown of Ottoman rule in Iraq, the Turkumen's preponderance in such Turkish cities as Kirkuk and Arbil gradually lessened. To be sure, the Turkomans population of Kirkuk, which was totally Turkish until the mid-twentieth century, had by 1959 declined to just over half, on account of the Kurdish migration from the surrounding villages. This intensified with the expansion of the oil industry in the Kirkuk area. Just as the Shi'a look to Najaf for guidance, the Turkumem of Iraq looked to Constantinople for inspiration.

Despite their effort to maintain close cultural and social links with Turkey, the Turkomen were overtaken by the speed of political developments in Iraq. Instead of bonding with their alma mater, their energy was exhausted by their endeavour to surmount the threat of Kurdish hegemony in the area which they had controlled earlier. This inveterate enmity between Kurds and Turkomans was behind many

²¹⁷ Geoff Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. xvi.

²¹⁸ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 37.

outrageous crimes perpetrated after the 1958 Revolution, particularly in the bloody July of 1959:

It is significant that all but 3 of the 31 officially reported as killed, and all but 6 of the 130 known to have been injured in the incidents were Turkumen, and that all but 4 of the 28 perpetrators of excesses executed on 22 June 1963 were Kurds.²¹⁹

In order that they may defend themselves against the perceived threat of the Kurds, the Turkmen of Iraq consistently took the side of the government against the Kurds. Furthermore, while the Kurds constitute a large proportion of the Communist Party, most of the Turkomans gave their support to the Arab nationalist and Ba'thist forces, which were locked in battle with the Communists for most of the period following the July 1958 coup.

The Sunni Arabs

The word Sunni is derived from *Sunna* which in Arabic means the original and corroborated body of Muslim system and traditions particularly those attributed to the Prophet himself. Like the rest of the Sunni Muslims throughout the world, the Sunni Arabs of Iraq do not question the legitimacy of the succession of the first four caliphs who succeeded Prophet Muhammed.

Most of the Sunni Arabs of Iraq, estimated to make up approximately twenty-five percent of the population, live in the triangular area between Mosul in the north, Baghdad in the south and the country towns along the Euphrates such as Fallouja,

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 912.

Ramadi, Hit Ana and Rawa.²²⁰ While the string of cities and country towns lying on the Tigris between Baghdad and Mosul are almost totally homogeneous, the religious affiliation of the capital Baghdad is mixed. Although certain parts of ancient Baghdad, such as Adhamiya, are overwhelmingly Sunni, others, such as Kadhimiya, are predominantly Shi'a, and most of the newly built quarters are mixed. During the fifties and sixties migration to the capital, particularly from the south and south central regions greatly changed the balance in favour of the Shi'a in the capital.

Because the Ottoman Empire was a "Sunni institution", the Sunnis of Iraq received more favourable treatment than the Shi'as:

It was the Sunnis who made use of whatever governmental educational facilities were provided (which were considerably increased towards the end of the nineteenth century) and were thus able to consolidate their position in the expanding local administration.²²¹

It is ironic that during the course of the First World War, and unlike the Shi'a population of Iraq, many members of the Sunni Arab bureaucratic and military elite, whose loyalty had been taken for granted by the Ottomans, shifted their loyalties from the crumbling Ottoman state to the British empire.²²²

Except for the brief periods when Iraq came under Persian rule, the Sunnis have always been more upwardly mobile than their Shi'a counterparts. Most followers of the pan-Arab nationalist movements who, among other things, dream of living under one Arab flag are Sunnis rather than Shi'a for the latter view such political movements as endangering to their own existence. The leaderships of the Istiqlal (Independence)

²²⁰ Sluglett, *Sunnis and Shi'as*, p. 78.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

²²² Sluglett, *Sunnis and Shi'as*, p. 79.

Party, Al-Shabab Al-Qawmi (Nationalist Youth) and indeed the ruling Ba'th Party are almost exclusively Sunni. During the royal era most, if not all, the aristocracy of officials and the ex-Sherifan officers who built the new state were also exclusively Sunnis.

Until 1963, the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party had to a large extent "the characteristic of a genuine partnership between the Sunni and Shi'a 'pan-Arab' youth". But as Batatu points out, "the role of the Sunnis had risen sharply, while that of the Shi'a had decisively declined".²²³ In point of fact, this party was soon to be transformed at the hands of Saddam Hussein into an exclusively Sunni institution.²²⁴ More than any other previous government, Saddam Hussein restricted the two sensitive sectors: the military and foreign services, to Sunni Arabs. This identification of the Sunnis with the central government in Iraq is behind Sunni aversion to political radicalism and revolutionary parties which received far more popular support among the non-Sunni Arabs, Kurds and other ethnic and religious groups. Although as intellectuals the Sunnis were well represented in the higher levels of the Communist Party, they were quite thinly represented in its rank and file.²²⁵ When, towards the end of his rule, General Qassim attempted to win over the nationalists and Nasserites and decided to follow an even-handed policy towards Communists and nationalists alike, the few Communists in such Sunni strongholds as Adhamiya and Mosul, to mention only two examples, had to flee their hometowns. This was not because of persecution or police harassment but because the vast Sunni majority in these towns abhorred the teachings and practices of the Communist Party.

²²³ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 1078.

Most of the ruling elite in modern Iraq came from the Sunni families of Baghdad and Mosul. This concentration of power in the hands of the Sunnis so incensed the Shi'as that in 1927 it drove them to express their desire that it would be "far preferable for them to return to the days of complete British rule than to be under the control of Sunni administration".²²⁶ With the passage of time, however, the ruling elite gradually underwent a substantial change in the nature of its composition. Many Sunni families from the upper and mid-Tigris towns such as Samarra, Tikrit and Al-Dawr descended upon the capital to settle there. More Sunni families came from the Western towns along the Euphrates, Ramadi, Fallouja, Hit, Rawa and Ana.²²⁷ The influence of the Sunni Baghdadis, which was paramount during the monarchy and well through General Qassim's rule, waned with the seizure of power by Abdul Salam Aref, who unashamedly favoured and advanced those whose origin was from the Ramadi area. The Aref brothers however were surpassed by Saddam Hussein whose bias towards the Tikritis has become so proverbial that the feelings of many Iraqis, Shi'as as well as Sunnis find full expression in a vernacular poem entitled "Wish that I were born a Tikriti" which circulated in secret in Iraq during the Iraq-Iran war.²²⁸

Besides the security apparatus, armed forces and foreign service the Sunni Arabs have also been prominent in the manufacturing field. The reason, in the words of Hanna Batatu, is not difficult to discern:

²²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 1079.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 663.

²²⁶ Nakash, *Shiis of Iraq*, p. 116.

²²⁷ Al-Uzri, *The Problem of Government*, p. 43.

²²⁸ Among the many Iraqi poets living in exile, the most vociferous critic of Saddam's sectarianism is Mudhaffar Al-Nawwab whose poem 'Arous Al-Quds' (The Bride of Jerusalem) devotes many passages to the exposition of nepotism, greed, monopoly of power and betrayal of one's principles.

Sunni men of capital, being more closely connected than moneyed Shi'as with the existing state structure, had on the whole less difficulty in securing from the government the legislative or financial assistance upon which the progress of factories so much depended and therefore were less averse to the long term investments that industry required.²²⁹

Christians

The vast majority of the Christians in Iraq live in the northern region of the country, more specifically in the Mosul area, where they populate whole towns and villages such as Bashiqa and Telkif. Sizeable Christian minorities also exist in Baghdad and Basra. Like many other Christian minorities in the Middle East, those living in Iraq are descendants of the early Christians who had adopted the gospel long before Christianity spread in Europe. As pointed out earlier, most Christians viewed the British as "saviours" and showed readiness to co-operate with them even against their own compatriots.

During the monarchy, the Christians as well as the Jews played a significant part in economic activities in Iraq, particularly in the import-export sector where they were offered preferential terms by the British, and the years immediately following the British conquest witnessed a "vigorous advance in the acquisition of landed and house property".²³⁰

A substantial proportion of the Iraqi Christians have, since the fall of the monarchy, emigrated to Europe, particularly to Britain. They also settled in the United States, Canada and elsewhere. Some Christians played a significant part in the political

²²⁹ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 272.

history of Iraq. The man who is behind the establishment of the Iraqi Communist Party and the spread of Marxism-Leninism in Iraq is Christian: Yusuf Salman Yusuf, better known to the Iraqis and Middle Easterners by his *nom de guerre*, Fahad. Of the sixteen Iraqis who formed the nucleus of the Communist Party in the late twenties and early thirties, five were Christians.²³¹

The Assyrians

Many Assyrian Iraqis are descendants of the ancient Assyrian people of Nineveh. They inhabit a large area between the lower Zab and the Tigris, stretching from Dohuk to Shaykhan and Zakhu in the north to Amadiya, Aqra, and Rawinduz in the north-east. The Assyrians are Christians and their church dates back to the first century. The present Assyrian population of Iraq however is a mixture of original Assyrians and those Assyrians who had thrown their lot in with the Allied Forces during the First World War, in the hope that they would be rewarded with a national homeland when the hostilities came to an end.

A considerable number of the Iraqi Assyrians have migrated to Europe and the United States in three major waves. The first took place immediately after the 1958 Revolution when many of them felt unsafe having witnessed the brutality of the new regime towards those who were perceived to be pro-Western. Ten years later, following the Six-Day war and the 1968 coup in Iraq, more Assyrians left the country as the new regime inaugurated its rule with public hangings and calls for the extermination of the imperialist stooges and Western lackeys. It was after the Gulf

²³⁰ Batatu, *Social Classes*, pp. 247-8, 261.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 416-22.

War in 1991 that most Assyrians decided to look for a new haven for themselves as they felt progressively more alienated from the regime.

Having sided with Britain during First World War, the Assyrians became a responsibility of the British particularly after the British advance, towards the end of World War I into, North West Persia.²³² Finding that the Assyrians were denied their rights and were ill-treated, Britain extended a helping hand and rescued them by offering them at first refugee camps in Iraq then cultivable lands to settle on.²³³

Like other minorities and ethnic groups who did not have nation states, the Assyrians were looking forward to the end of the Great War in the hope that their cause might be done justice. The British honoured their promise and opened the north of Iraq to unlimited immigration. Hopwood estimates that the United Kingdom rescued "perhaps one third of their original number".²³⁴ There, they were given lands to cultivate, offered a number of tax concessions and thousands of them were recruited into a British-officered army where housing and maintenance, among other things, were provided.

Competition between Britain and France over supremacy in the Middle East was behind much of the suffering of the unhappy lot of the Assyrians, whose leadership was totally unrealistic and blind to the hard realities of life:

It was the more unfortunate that stories of a vast Greater Assyria to be achieved by French assistance gained credence and helped to poison Assyrian-Iraqi relations, which the apparent British favour to a foreign and Christian community made

²³² Hopwood, *Social Structure*, p. 15.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

anyhow delicate, and which was unassisted by any pretence of Assyrian devotion to Arab and Muslim Iraq.²³⁵

Part of the problem the Assyrians found themselves in was the fact that most of them never really considered Iraq as their home country although they were very well treated not only by the British administration, which supervised the Assyrian settlement in Iraq but also by the national authority. On account of their high expectations and their hopes of returning to their home country victorious, as they were on the side of the victorious, they never really attempted to integrate into the community in which they lived. It was only in 1926 that it became apparent they would not be allowed to go back to their homes. When the scheme to repatriate them "in Canada or elsewhere failed"²³⁶ there was no other alternative open to them but to stay in Iraq and try to adopt it as their homeland. The uneasy ethnic relationship between the Muslim Iraqis and the Christian newcomers was behind friction, mutual distrust and veiled, as well as open, harassment.

Commenting on this relationship between the Assyrians and the people in the areas in which they settled, Batatu points out that the grudge felt by the Assyrians towards their fellow compatriots never really faded despite the passage of many years:

The Assyrians, a foreign and inassimilable people, whom the English had employed as mercenary troops and whose very name still irritated Iraqis had nursed a bitter hatred against Arab Mosul ever since 1933, when officers from

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²³⁵ Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950*, p. 147.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

this town played a prominent role in the crushing of a forlorn Assyrian rebellion.²³⁷

When Britain announced that it would end its mandate in Iraq, the Assyrians felt threatened. On account of their voluntary service in the British-officered Iraq Levy, anti-Assyrian feelings intensified against them, especially as they were used to quell Iraqi rebellions and punish Arab and Kurdish insurgents.²³⁸ A year after Iraq had gained independence some Assyrians tried to flee to Syria in the hope that the French would grant them what the British did not, but they were turned back by the French and the relationship between the Assyrians and the Iraqis reached its nadir.²³⁹ When the Assyrians discovered that the French were not interested in their problems, they returned home with their hopes dashed. From then onwards, deterioration in Assyrian-Iraqi relations manifested itself in frequent large-scale armed clashes.²⁴⁰ King Ghazi's ruthless campaign against the village of Simayle, is still commemorated with grief among the Assyrians all over the world:

On the morning of 11 August [1933], a motor machine-gun company of the Iraq Army entered the village in good order under its officers, and proceeded methodically to the massacre of every man in the village. The work was complete by early afternoon, and the troops withdrew in their vehicles. They returned next day to bury the dead, some 315 in number including 4 women and 6 children.²⁴¹

²³⁷ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 869. It seems there is unanimous agreement among scholars that the Assyrians were quite difficult to rule or deal with. 'The Assyrians were not an easy group to deal with, indisciplined, disunited, and their leaders making impossible claims for special status'. See Hopwood. *Social Structures*, p. 15.

²³⁸ Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950*, p. 197.

²³⁹ Hopwood, *Social Structures*, p. 15.

²⁴⁰ Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950*, p. 234.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 235.

The impact of the Assyrian rebellion and the resultant massacre left deep wounds not only in the Arab- or even Kurdish-Assyrian relations but also in the Muslim-Christian relations in the country. The term 'Assyrian' and by extension 'Christian' became in the unwritten Arabic lexicon synonymous with 'untrustworthy', a 'potential traitor' with similar connotations to the term 'un-American' during the McCarthy period in post-war U. S. A.²⁴² What aggravated Christian-Muslim relations in Iraq was the fact that most Iraqi Christians and Jews saw in the British either protectors or 'defenders' of the faith. As a result, many of them came to be perceived as willing servants and miscreants who take the side of the adversary, Britain, which was until recently public enemy number one in the region.

The previous pages have shown that the political entity, which came into being as an independent state between the Wars, encompassed a medley of peoples with different origins, sects and religions. Religiously, the vast majority of Iraqis are Muslims. Christians form small minorities, which are quite active socially, politically, culturally and economically. On an ethnic level, the Arabs constitute the majority of the people. Kurds constitute a sizeable minority, which has, since the creation of Iraq, been seeking to preserve its culture, language and achieve some sort of home rule in the Kurd-populated north and north-east region of the country. The Kurds played a significant part in the history of the modern state. Some of the most sensitive posts, especially in the civil service and the armed forces, were held by Kurds.

²⁴² The full name of Tariq Aziz, long time Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq is Tariq Aziz Hanna. But his family name is always dropped by the government owned and run media as Hanna is clearly a common Christian name frequently associated in Iraq with the Assyrians or Tilkaifis - the poor Christian inhabitants of a small agricultural village in the Mosul area many of whom took up menial jobs including sewage cleaning which the Muslims regarded below their dignity. It is significant that upon Michael Aflaq's death in 1989 the Iraqi government declared that Aflaq, the founding father of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party had converted to Islam long before his death.

The majority of the Muslim Arabs in Iraq are Shi'a. With the possible exception of Bahrain, Iraq is the only Arab state with a Shi'a majority. The Sunnis however played, and continue to play, a leading part in the political life of the country. It was the Sunni officers, who had been serving in the Ottoman army, that led the military operations against the Ottomans during World War I. Those same Sunni officers also played a most prominent part in building the modern state of Iraq, both during and after the British Mandate. The Shi'a religious leaderships, on the other hand, played a vital part in the 1920 Revolt. Sunni-Shi'a cooperation was quite instrumental in ending the Mandate and gaining full independence in 1932.

Despite ethnic, religious and sectarian differences and despite the turmoil over the past seven decades, the common denominator which has bound most, if not all, Iraqis together was their sense of belonging to an Iraqi political entity. Regardless of their ethnic origin, religion or sect, Iraqis often express pride in their "Iraqiness", in the fact that they belong to a country with a rich history and vast resources. A pervasive feeling of frustration, brought about by the injustices of successive regimes, is among the most distinguishing characteristics of the Iraqi society. This feeling of frustration has escalated immensely since the Ba'th Party came to power in 1968. For it was the Ba'thists who adopted political violence as the most effective means of communication with their adversaries. The unprecedented lengths to which Saddam Hussein's regime has gone to silence his critics has had an immense impact, not only on the way in which the Iraqi opposition has functioned, but also on Iraqi society at large.

Chapter 3: Iraqi Opposition From The British Occupation To The Gulf War

This chapter discusses the development of political opposition in Iraq from the end of World War I to the Gulf War of 1991. Attention will be given to the history of opposition parties and groupings, which will be traced through the Mandate years, Monarchist Iraq and post-1958 Iraq to the dramatic events of the first quarter of 1991. The social composition and general aim of the opposition groups will also be briefly considered. It is hoped that this chapter will provide a general background against which the post-Gulf War opposition, both inside and outside Iraq, might be better understood and analysed. While in chapter I emphasis was placed on the major historical events witnessed by the modern state of Iraq, this chapter will provide a political map of the Iraqi opposition. It will also focus on the popular responses, both organised and otherwise, to the major historic events since the birth of the new nation.

To understand the history of political opposition in Iraq, it would be instructive to remember a saying considered axiomatic by Iraqis in the past: "The Twin Rivers are both a blessing and a curse". While the Tigris and Euphrates, so the reasoning goes, ensured ample supplies of water, the vital prerequisite for agriculture and hence livelihood, they also attracted foreign powers and were the indirect cause of successive attacks and invasions which turned their land into a perpetual battlefield. As a result, the inhabitants of the Land Between the Two Rivers were, as it were, doomed to live under foreign occupation for much of their ancient history. In more recent times, the discovery of huge oil reserves in the northern, southern and central regions of the country gave Iraq an added strategic importance and made it the focus

of rivalry between Europe and the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century and between European powers themselves later on.²⁴³

On account of the long history of foreign occupations, whether those by coreligionist invaders such as the Ottomans and Persians, or by powers which are far afield from Iraq culturally, racially and religiously such as the Greeks in the Dark Ages, the Mongols during the Middle Ages and the British during the First World War, the Iraqis developed a hostile attitude towards their rulers. This hostile attitude, the natural result of oppression at the hands of foreign occupiers, has become so ingrained in their national consciousness that it will take a considerable time to modify, let alone erase it. Besides, Iraq is, as pointed out earlier,²⁴⁴ the birthplace of Shi'aism, one of the oldest and most resilient organised opposition fraternities. The movement never lost its momentum, for Shi'aism has, since the success of the Khomeini Revolution in Iran, raised, among other things, hopes among millions of Shi'a followers around the world and at the same time inspired terror in many quarters, both regionally and internationally, especially as it seeks to achieve its goals through armed struggle.

The Growth of Arab Nationalism

Political opposition in modern Iraq may be said to have originated during the early years of the twentieth century when many Iraqis, particularly those who were Turkish educated or those who had come into close contact with the Turks, felt compelled to assert their identity and reject the process of Turkishization as a reaction to the rising

²⁴³ Nezar Tawfeeq Al-Hassou, *Al-Sira' Ala Sulta Fil Iraq Al-Malaki (Struggle for Power in Monarchist Iraq)* (Baghdad: Dar Afaq Arabiya, 1984). P. 35.

²⁴⁴ See Chapter II above pp. ff.

tide of nationalism in Turkey.²⁴⁵ During the last few years of the Ottoman Empire's life, the oppressive policies followed by them towards the Arabs strengthened the Arabs' will to struggle for independence in order to shake the Ottoman yoke once and for all. The worsening conditions in the Ottoman occupied territories ensured the popularity of any Arab nationalist movement among the educated few. To this end, clandestine organisations were set up, whose main aim was to call for legal reforms and, with the outbreak of the First World War, independence. Among the better known secret organisations are: *Al-Qahtaniya*, *Al-Ahd* and *Al-Fatat*.²⁴⁶ This rather feeble opposition impulse, which lacked both direction and philosophy, was in point of fact a hasty response and constituted a form of defence mechanism. It was never clearly defined, widespread, or in any way effective.

With the British occupation of the country during World War I opposition almost suddenly become a popular movement with a huge following, particularly in the rural areas which came to regard the British as alien usurpers and perjurers since they reneged on their promise to "liberate Iraq from the Ottomans".²⁴⁷

Opposition in British-Ruled Iraq

Anti-British opposition may be said to have been propagated by three major groupings: Islamists, Iraqi nationalists and Pan-Arab nationalists. Of the three, the Islamists were by far more pervasive and influential. Among the parties which played a significant part in inflaming the populace and inciting them against the British was

²⁴⁵ Hasan Shubbar, *Al-'Amal Al-Hizbi Fil Iraq: 1908-1958 (Party Political Work in Iraq: 1908-1958)* (Beirut: Dar Al-Turath Al-Arabi, 1989), p. 20.

²⁴⁶ Nazar Al-Hassou, *Al-Sira' Ala Sultah Fil Iraq Al-Malaki (Struggle for Power in Monarchist Iraq)* (Baghdad: Afaq Arabiyah, 1984), p. 36.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Jam'iyat Al-Nahdha Al-Islamia (Islamic Awakening Society). This politico-religious gathering, played a considerable part in the 1920 Revolt, was formed during the latter part of 1917 when a number of religious leaders and well-established dignitaries met in the Shi'a shrine city of Najaf for the purpose of organising resistance to British rule. Among them were Muhammad Jawad Al-Jaza'ri who headed the *Jam'iya*, Muhammad Ali Bahr Al-Uloun, Abbas Ali Al-Rammahi, Abbas Al-Khalili and others. The constitution of the *Jam'iya* stated that the main objectives were ending British occupation, establishing the rule of Islam, and extending help to all Arabs and Muslims seeking independence.²⁴⁸

Jam'iya Al-Nahdha may have been the first political grouping in Iraq to espouse violence in order to further their cause. Its role in inflaming the people against Britain ignited what many call the "Najaf Rebellion", which in turn paved the way for the 1920 Revolt.²⁴⁹ The attack on the headquarters of the British administrator in Najaf is a case in point. The operation, which was masterminded and executed by Haj Najm Al-Buggal resulted in the death of the British officer W. M. Marshall and some of his soldiers.²⁵⁰ As might be expected the British responded swiftly and vigorously. The city of Najaf was soon besieged and became totally isolated from the rest of the country. Upon storming the starved city, a court martial headed by Lieut. Col. Leachman who was later to be killed at the hands of Sheikh Dhari, sought to give the

²⁴⁸ Shubbar, *Party Political Work*, pp. 37-38.

²⁴⁹ Ali Al-Mumin, *Sanawat Al-Jamr: Masirat Al-Harakah Al-Islamiya Fil Iraq (Years of Amber: The Islamic Movement in Iraq)* (London: Dar Al-Maseera, 1993), p. 20.

²⁵⁰ Al-Nafisi, *The Role of the Shi'a*, p. 57.

Najafis a lesson they would not forget: 13 men were executed, 7 were imprisoned and about 105 were exiled to India.²⁵¹

While *Jam'iyat Al-Nahdha* was almost an exclusively Shi'a institution, *Al-Ahd Al-Iraqi* (Iraqi Covenant Society) was mainly a Sunni gathering. Its founders were for the most part secular Sunni Arabs, many of whom had either studied in Turkish schools or had even served in the Ottoman army. The Society was originally established in Istanbul in 1913 and did not become known as the *Iraqi Ahd* until 1918 when difference between its leaders on strategy and priorities led to its division into a Syrian and an *Iraqi Ahd*.²⁵²

The primary aim of the *Al-Ahd* Society was to achieve independence for Iraq through peaceful means, as many of its founding members had been ex-officers in the Ottoman army but who had played a significant part in helping the British cause during the Great War. Those believed in what the British had promised and expected their long cherished wish to be granted as soon as the dust of the hostilities settled. When no such thing materialised, most of the *Ah* leaders became disillusioned and turned away from Britain. Impatient with the delaying tactics of the occupation forces, some of its leaders resorted in November 1918 to armed struggle and went so far as to storm a British military garrison and take commander and troops as prisoners of war. In its attempt to wrest independence from Britain. The *Ahd* sought assistance from the old occupiers of Iraq: the Turks who proved quite willing to oblige. They supplied the *Ahd's* envoy with light weapons but not with cannons for fear that they may occupy Mosul, which Turkey never ceased to grudge as part of its own territory.

²⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 62. .

Despite the immense disparity in arms, training and discipline the *Ahd*'s initial military operations were met with some success. In Telaffar near Mosul, for example, their armed men under the veteran Jamil Al-Madfa'i, who was to rise to prominence throughout monarchist Iraq, managed to inflict heavy losses on the British forces, killing the commanding officer Major J. E. Barlow and his assistants and evicting the British troops from the area.²⁵³

Rapid developments however overtook the *Ahd*: The eruption of 1920 Revolt in the mid-Euphrates created an unprecedented upheaval. On top of this, came the expulsion, a month later, of Faisal's government from Syria. The latter episode put an end to the *Ahd*'s dream of founding an independent pan-Arab state in which Iraqis, Syrians and other Arabs in the region could live under one banner.²⁵⁴

Disillusionment with the British led a number of Iraqi dignitaries, particularly among the Baghdad social and religious elite to form in February 1919 a political party aimed specifically at fighting the British presence in Iraq and then to achieve independence. *Jami'yat Haras Al-Istiqlal* (Guardians of Independence Society) included such eminent figures as Muhammad Baqir Al-Shibibi, Jalal Baban, Yusuf Al-Suwaidi, Jaffar Abul Timman, Dr Sami Shawkat, Muhammad Al-Sadr and others who were later to occupy prominent positions in independent Iraq. These included, in the case of Al-Sadr and Al-Suwaidi, premierships. The most significant fact about the *Haras Al-Istiqlal* is its social composition. Even at that early stage in the political history of Iraq, its leadership, which included secular and religious men, Sunni and

²⁵² Shubbar, *Party Political Work*, p. 42.

²⁵³ Al-Nefisi, *The Role of the Shi'a*, pp. 132-33.

²⁵⁴ Shubbar, *Party Political Work*, pp. 48-51.

Shi'a ulamas, Arabs and Kurds, rose above sectarianism and any social, ethnic or religious divides.

Although in its general orientation, the *Ahd* society was nationalist Iraqi rather than pan-Arab, it was also, theoretically at least, open to non-Muslims. The Society may be considered as another Islamic grouping which strove to expel the British. Many of its founders, such as Muhammad Al-Sadr, were in fact either prominent clerics, or descendants of highly revered religious families such as Al-Shibibi, later to be called the "Poet of the 1920 Revolt". On account of the social and religious influence of its leadership, the broad-based *Haras* Society gained wide popularity throughout the country and received substantial contributions from sympathisers and supporters from across the country.²⁵⁵ So strong was the desire of the *Haras* to organise and unite resistance to foreign rule that it sought to attract as many sympathisers as it could. To that end, it directed its attention towards the young. Soon enough the first youth organisation in Iraq, known as the *Jam'iyat Al-Shabiba Al-Ja'ffariya* which was founded in 1919 and comprised mainly students and adult learners, dissolved itself and joined the *Haras*.²⁵⁶

This initial success was not to continue for long. In their attempt to widen the circle of opposition, the *Haras* leaders approached the *Ahd* Society with a view to forming a "national front". They persevered despite the fact that many of its leaders viewed the *Ahd* Society as a suspect grouping, whose actions betrayed a lack of enthusiasm for independence. The negotiations between the two Societies produced no result and the

²⁵⁵ *Muthakarat Al-Sayyid Gati' Al-Awwadi (The Memoirs of Al-Sayyid Gati' Al-Awwadi)*, ed., Kamil Salman Aljubouri (Baghdad: Al-Diwani Press, 1987), p. 13.

²⁵⁶ Shubbar, *Party Political Work*, p. 60.

project was finally abandoned. This early effort at forging a united opposition front was, as will be discussed later, the first of many such ill-fated attempts which failed because of the suspicions, accusations and counter accusations exchanged between the different opposition groupings.²⁵⁷

Regular contacts with other religious and political groupings were however maintained. The weekly meetings, which were held in mosques and public places particularly in Kadhimiya in which a *Haras* Society leader would incite the populace, went down quite well with the people. As expected, this worried the occupation forces which could not tolerate such public gatherings in which the British were denounced and vilified. In August 1920, the British forces banned such gatherings, arrested most of the *Haras* leaders and caused the rest to flee the country.²⁵⁸

Opposition in Mandate Iraq

During the period 1921-1932, Iraq witnessed a number of dramatic developments in the political arena. Political parties and groupings mushroomed and the political awareness of the masses grew even more acute, as many of the political parties, which used to operate underground came out into the open and began to propagate their ideas in order to attract newcomers and influence the public. During that decade ten political parties were established. These were *Al-Nahdah Al-Iraqiya* (Iraqi Renaissance Party), *Al-Watani Al-Iraqi* (Iraqi National Party), *Al-Hurr Al-Iraqi* (Iraqi Free Party), *Al-Umma* (the Nation Party), *Al-Taqaddum* (Progress Party), *Al-Sha'b* (the People's Party), *Al-Watani Al-Iraqi-Mosul* (National Iraqi Party-Mosul), *Al-Istiqlal* (Independence Party), *Al-Ahd Al-Iraqiya* (Iraqi Covenant Party) and *Al-Ikha'*

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

Al-Watani (National Brotherhood Party). Except for *Al-Watani Al-Iraqi* and *Al-Nahdha Al-Iraqi*, most of these parties were weak and had no real following among the people.

Exploiting the freedom of expression, the Watani and Nahdha parties were, albeit for a short time, quite active. They organised mass demonstrations and rallies in which they demanded an end to British involvement in Iraq's affairs.²⁵⁹ Most of the founders of these two parties had been involved in politics since the days when the three Wilayas of what is now modern Iraq were under Ottoman rule. While the Watani was founded by lawyers, businessmen, religious men from Sunni and Shi'a communities, the Nahdha was predominantly Shi'a in composition.²⁶⁰ These two parties, which are more akin to *ad hoc* political Committees than to modern political parties, had no clear philosophy or well defined social vision and their main political aims were, in many ways, almost identical in that they both sought to achieve independence and bring Iraq out of Britain's orbit.²⁶¹

Prompted by a desire to exert maximum pressure on the newly created regime in Baghdad, which was weak before the power of the High Commissioner, the leadership in both parties entered into negotiations aimed at uniting their resources and merging their forces. The joint rallies and demonstrations drew ever increasing crowds. On the first anniversary of King Faisal's accession, 23rd August, 1922, the two parties called for a mass protest demonstration. While speakers from the newly

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*., p. 72.

²⁵⁹ Wamidh Omar Nadhmi, Shafeek Abdul Razzaq and Ghanim Salih, *Al-Tattawour Al-Siasi Al-Mu'asir Fil Iraq (Political Development in Contemporary Iraq)*, (Baghdad: Baghdad University Press, [1981]), p. 173.

²⁶⁰ *Al-Nafisi*, p. 199.

²⁶¹ *Shubbar*, pp. 92-93.

unified parties were addressing the demonstrators someone suddenly shouted "Down with the Mandate" and "Down with England".²⁶² This was enough to provide Sir Percy Cox, the High Commissioner with the necessary *casus belli*. His response was immediate and severe. The headquarters of both parties were closed and sealed, their two organs *Al-Mufid* and *Al-Rafidan* were banned. Many leaders from both parties were exiled. From the *Watani* Party the following men were banished: Hamdi Al-Pachachi, Muhammad Mahdi Al-Basir, Ja'ffar Abul Timman and Abdul-Ghafur Al-Badri. From *Al-Nahdha* Party Amin Al-Charchafchi and Abdul-Rasoul Kubba were deported. These unpopular measures alienated even further the Mandate government from the people.²⁶³

Al-Nahdha remained banned until 1924 when, at the hands of the then prime minister, Yasin Al-Hashimi, it was permitted to resume activities. Al-Hashimi wanted to use the party as a vehicle to support him against his rival, Abdul Muhsin Al-Sadoun. However, it was not until 1927, when the party became fully active and influential. Its official organ, *Al-Nahdha*, which continued to wag an unrelenting war against "British stooges" in the government achieved great popularity among the educated Iraqis. Following its closure in November 1927, the party soon dwindled into oblivion, never to recover again.²⁶⁴

Al-Watani may be said to have fared better than *Al-Nahdha*. In July 1928 when its original founder, Jaffar Abul Timman, was granted the necessary permit most of the

²⁶² Hasan Shubbar, *Al-'Amal Al-Hizbi Fil Iraq: 1908-1958 (Party Political Work in Iraq: 1908-1958)* (Beirut: Dar Al-Turath Al-Arabi, 1989), points out that the whole incident was thought out and planned by the High Commissioner who was particularly unhappy with the growing anti-British sentiment which the two parties encouraged and who was waiting for a proper excuse to silence dissenting voices. See *Shubbar*, pp. 94-95.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

old members quickly rejoined the party. *Al-Watani* practically led Iraqi popular opposition during 1928 and 1929, when the government was accused of being especially harsh on students.

In an attempt to contain the threat posed by political parties, some of which had become a thorn in the side of the government, King Faisal proposed that all Iraqis join one single party so that their efforts might be better directed towards the building of the nation. The idea was extensively debated, with the press welcoming it at first.²⁶⁵ But the idea was abandoned when it became clear that the public would not stomach it.

Mention should be made of the role played by *Jabhat Al-Ta'akhi* (Fraternal Front) which was made up of the *Watani* (National Party) and *Al-Ikha' Al-Watani* (National Brotherhood Party). The Front which came into being in November 1930, fought mainly against the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty which was seen as a "veil for continued British direction of their country".²⁶⁶ The Front proved quite influential in wide sectors of the community, organising general strikes and inciting public opinion against the government of Nuri Al-Said, who was ousted in October 1931. The Front lost its grip on public opinion after some of its leaders either resigned or were won over by the establishment. The fatal blow came in March 1935 when all political parties were banned at the hands of Yassin Al-Hashimi's government.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Nadhmi, *Political Development*, p. 167.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 91.

²⁶⁶ Hopwood, p. 10.

²⁶⁷ Shubbar, pp. 132-33.

Opposition: from Independence to Declaration of the Republic

Al-Hashimi's move against the free exercise of political activities in Iraq may have been inspired by the Turkish example. Hasan Shubbar points out that the Turkish ruler had earlier spoken to Nuri Al-Said about the advantages of one-party rule and the disadvantages of a multi-party system which could bring about chaos and perpetual disturbances.²⁶⁸ However, the period immediately following independence witnessed dramatic developments as far as party political work is concerned: it saw the birth of, amongst other grass root political organisations, the two most influential political parties in the history of the country: the Communist party in 1934 and later on, during the late forties, its rival the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party. To pursue their goals, these two parties, as well as the other political organisations had either to operate underground or to use front organisations through which they could spread their ideas and attract supporters to their cause.

Jama'at Al-Ahali (the People's Group) was the earliest political opposition organisation to resort to clandestine means in order to broaden its popular base. The *Ahali* group, which was made up of young intellectuals and Western educated men, was established early in 1931 but did not become recognised as a popular movement until a year later when it published the now defunct daily *Al-Ahali*. This was to play a very important role over three decades. Among its founders were: Abdul-Qadir Ismael, who later became the secretary general of the Communist Party, Muhammad Hadid, later to become General Abdul Karim Qassim's political and economic arm,

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

and Abdul Fattah Ibrahim, who later founded *Al-Sha'b* (People's Party). Kamil Al-Chadirchi, the doyen of Iraqi reformist opposition joined *Al-Ahali* group a year later.

Through its two front organisations, Society for the Eradication of Illiteracy and the Baghdad Club, the *Ahali* group managed to attract a number of young enthusiasts as well as old politicians. Many of the social dignitaries and influential men won over by the Society for the Eradication of Illiteracy later became prime ministers. These include Dr Fadhil Al-Jamali and cabinet members such as Khalil Kannah, Sadiq Al-Bassam, Nasrat Al-Farisi and a host of others who were to play an important role in the political history of modern Iraq. The secret organisation behind the front organisations was called *Al-Jam'iya Al-Sirriya Al-Sha'biya* (the Secret Popular Society) which in 1934 was joined by Hikmat Suleiman, who was well connected and had close links with a number of high ranking ambitious army officers. In 1936 Hikmat Suleiman succeeded in luring the *Ahali* group to lend its full support to General Bakr Sidqi's coup which brought Hikmet Suleiman to the fore and who in turn relied heavily on members of the Secret Society. With many of the Secret Society leaders in the cabinet, Bakr Sidqi's rule may be said to represent the first government made up largely of opposition elements. It was only a matter of time however before the *Ahali* group realised that their hasty support of the coup had backfired. Although on the face of it General Sidqi was not even a cabinet member, he was in point of fact the real power with whom all authority resided. On account of the bad performance of the government on almost every level, the *Ahali* group, which

was rightly identified with the coup, lost much of its popular support and caused a number of its leaders to abandon it in disgust.²⁶⁹

The Communist Party

Although the Communist Party has adopted 31 March 1934 as its official birthday, the Marxist movement in Iraq goes back, as Batatu points out, to as early as 1924.²⁷⁰ Between 1924 and 1934 a number of Marxist cells had been separately formed in Baghdad, Basrah and Nasiriya by young mostly middle class men who had, for one reason or another, been to Russia and had fallen under the spell of Communist teaching. But these early cells, however, were not well organised and, apart from expressing disenchantment with Arab history and traditions, had no clear vision of what they were seeking and offered no realistic alternative to existing institutions. Avoiding the newly-coined Arabic term '*Shiyu'iya*' (Communism) which was laden with unpopular associations the Baghdad cell founded a secret organisation under the name of *Jam'iyat Mukafahat Al-Isti'mar Wal Istithmar* (Society for the Eradication of Imperialism and Exploitation).²⁷¹

The three small Communist organisations succeeded in co-ordinating their efforts, and in 1935 the first issue of *Kifah Al'Sha'b* appeared bearing the words 'organ of the Central Committee of the Iraqi Communist Party' in its subtitle. But the party was soon to suffer the first of many devastating blows, exemplified in the execution, imprisonment and harassment of its members and sympathisers. Luckily for the Communist movement in Iraq, one of its founding leaders, iron-willed Yusuf Salman

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

²⁷⁰ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 304.

Yusuf, better known by his *nom de guerre* 'Fahad' was pursuing a course of study in Moscow during this period. Upon his return in December 1938 he embarked upon the arduous task of reconstructing the party, avoiding most of the old Communist cadre and opening a new chapter in the history of Communism in Iraq. Fahad wanted to mould the party in his own image. He also sought to build a party and along Stalinist lines, where any form of criticism or opposition, real or imagined, would not be tolerated.

In order to monopolise authority Fahad dismissed his potential rivals and critics trashing them with all sorts of accusations. Despite his heavy-handed measures and perhaps because of them, the party, throughout Fahad's chairmanship was plagued with numerous rifts, schisms and inner fighting. Between Fahad's return from Moscow and his execution in 1949 the Communist party underwent at least four major shake ups when Central Committee members rebelled against his leadership and formed rival Communist organisations. In point of fact the rifts and internal turmoil even crept into the cells and party organisations operating in prisons.

For more than two decades after its establishment, the Iraqi Communist Party had mainly attracted young intellectuals, students and labourers. Through this period the reputation and influence of the Communists went through many ups and downs. In 1941, for example the Communist Party supported Rashid Ali Al-Gailani's National Defence government only to turn against it, siding with the British who had earlier suppressed it but who were now fighting on the side of the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany. Ignoring anti-British popular sentiments, some Communists went so far as

²⁷¹ Shubbar, *Party Political Work*, p. 164.

to eulogise British statesmen whose names at that time invoked sad memories and bitterness.²⁷² More damaging to the Communist Party was the attitude adopted towards the question of Palestine especially following the publication of the UN Partition Plan and the subsequent creation of the state of Israel. The Iraqi Communists showed remarkable insensitivity when they slavishly followed the official Soviet line regarding recognition of the Jewish State. What further rendered the Communist movement suspect in the eyes of many Iraqis was the extraordinarily high proportion of Iraqi Jews within the party. The Iraqi Jews, writes Batatu, exercised

leading functions in the League Against Zionism and in the women's organisation of the party, and concentrated heavily as they were in the capital, contributed in strength to the lower and middle echelons of the Greater Baghdad party organisation. Moreover, for brief periods after the capture of Fahad - to be precise in April to August 1947 and in December 1948 to February 1949 - Jews guided the destinies of the party.²⁷³

As in other parts of the Arab world however, ²⁷⁴ the fifties witnessed the gradual growth of the Communist party which had become more actively involved in inciting the public against successive governments. It was during the Suez crisis that its popularity, along that of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, shot up due to the staunch anti British and pro-Nasser attitudes it had adopted. With the fear that the monarchists might lose their grip on the situation and with the identification of the Communists as the most dangerous underground organisations capable of influencing intellectuals

²⁷² One such article was written by the Secretary General of the Communist Party (Al-Shararah) Abdullah Masoud Al-Qraini which bore the title 'Churchill the Great'. See Shubbar, *Party Political Work*, p. 172.

²⁷³ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 650.

and illiterates alike, successive governments were intent on eradicating the Communist influence from such front organisations as the Democratic Youth, Students' Union and the League for the Defence of the Women's Rights.²⁷⁵

On account of the severity with which Communist members and their sympathisers were persecuted,²⁷⁶ the party adopted a highly intricate and secretive organisational structure which was not easy to infiltrate. The Party was therefore singled out for ruthless punishment. Sympathisers were jailed and dismissed from schools or work while leading members were deprived of their citizenship, and still others were executed. During the years just preceding the 1958 coup, the word 'Communist' became in official lingo synonymous with 'subversive' or 'terrorist'. What further weakened the Communist opposition in Iraq was the strategy laid down for the Party by what Batatu calls a "devil-may-care secretary" whose rash and ill-advised leadership cost the Party dearly.²⁷⁷ The party's strong opposition to the Baghdad Pact, which struck a popular chord among Iraqis, and the effective Soviet propaganda machine in the form of Arabic broadcasts manned almost entirely by Iraqi Communist exiles kept the Communists afloat until the 1958 coup which brought them as close as they ever got to the helm of authority.

It has to be remembered that throughout its history, the Communist Party, which succeeded in winning over many intellectuals, labourers and young students from a

²⁷⁴ Batatu notes that in Jordan the Communist-led National Front won more than 12% of the popular votes in what he calls "the freest election ever held" in that country. In Syria the Communists managed even to penetrate the armed forces while in Egypt Marxists advanced to the front in the radio, press, theatre and publishing fields. See Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 748.

²⁷⁵ Simon, *Iraq*, p. 294.

²⁷⁶ Zeki Khairi, *Sada Al-Sineen Fi Thakirat Shiyoui 'I Iraqi Mukhadhram (The Echo of Years in the Memories of a Veteran Iraqi Communist)* (Guttenburgh: Markaz Al-Harf Al-Arabi, 1996), p. 126.

²⁷⁷ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 688.

wide range of social and ethnic groups, was always viewed with suspicion by many segments in society, particularly the traditionalists and the Islamists.²⁷⁸ On the other hand, rival parties were quite envious of the dedication and commitment of its followers and were also suspicious of its intentions. Iraqi politicians were so apprehensive of the new breed of young dedicated enthusiasts, who had fallen under the spell of the Communist slogans, that they came to consider them as alien bodies in the political structure of the country and refused to recognise them as a political party. The Communists succeeded above all else to give a generalised expression of the bitter feelings of the masses and

fertilised these feelings with Communist ideas, and promised, if only they could band together, a conclusion of their problems far more favourable than any they dared to hope.²⁷⁹

When, in 1954, the National Front was formed, the Communists signed the communiqué as individuals and not as a distinct political group.²⁸⁰ It was in fact not until 1957 that the Iraqi Communist Party broke their isolation and formally 'joined hands with the National Democrats, the Ba'th and the Independence party'.²⁸¹

The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party

Although the Ba'th Party had been in existence since 1947, its activities were never felt at a popular level in Iraq until the mid fifties. Its pan-Arab philosophy found a favourable echo during the Suez crisis when many Arabs came to view Gamal Abdul

²⁷⁸ In his memoirs, Communist Party Central Committee member Zeki Khairi defends championing the causes of all minorities and ethnic groups: "Yes we are the party of the minorities, the party of all sects including the Shi'a sect which forms approximately three fifths of the population. What is to be done then? The Communists have simply won the oppressed who have been for long deceived by imperialism which claimed to defend their rights". See Zeki, Khairi, *Communist Memory*, pp. 130-31.

²⁷⁹ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 612.

²⁸⁰ Batatu, *Social Classes*, pp. 760-62.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 750.

Nasser as the Saladin of the modern age, who would expel all foreign influence from the Arab region and return the lands lost in the first round of hostilities between the Arabs and Israel in 1948. Students and young people were particularly enamoured with the three aims which the Ba'thists aspired to: unity, liberty and socialism. Unlike the Communists, who could draw on the experiences of the intellectual output of a world power, the Ba'thists only had Michael Aflaq, who was regarded by all Ba'thists then as their authoritative teacher. His thoughts were:

A mixture of essentially humanitarian nationalism and aspects of individualism of the enlightenment, the democratism of the Jacobins, ...the class standpoint of Marx, the elitism of Lenin, and over and above that, a strong dose of Christian spirituality and nationalistically interpreted Islam. The mixture is often mechanical. In other words Aflaq makes no serious attempt to synthesise the ideas that he imbibed.²⁸²

Despite the serious flaws and shortcomings of Ba'thist ideology and because of the emphasis on the role of Islam and the importance of Arab traditions their party found it much easier than the Communists to penetrate the political scene. Furthermore, it was not confronted with any real hostility on the part of the security apparatus which had singled out the Communists as subversive elements. The Communists, to the exclusion of almost all other opposition groupings, were hotly pursued and persecuted. In a way McCarthyism remained in Iraq a long time after it had peaked in the United States.

During the last five years or so of the royal regime, when popular sentiment was decidedly hostile to practically whoever came to form a cabinet, the Ba'thists made some gains in the street but, unlike the Communists, found that their base was still not

solid enough to enable them to organise protest demonstrations or call for general strikes. During that period all political parties, those officially licensed as well as those underground, were particularly active in denouncing government policies and for calling for democratisation and resisting moves to rebind Iraq to the West in a new alliance which was to be known as Baghdad Pact. In the 1954 election, and despite the corruption which characterised it, the opposition managed to win eleven seats in a *Majlis* (parliament) of 135.²⁸³ The Arab Ba'th Party which²⁸⁴ by 1954 had only attracted some five hundred members was still quite weak and its strategies were laid down by 'neophytes in politics'.²⁸⁵ They could not even string out a few names to put forward candidates, let alone win seats in the parliament.²⁸⁶

The 1956 Suez crisis may be said to be the first opportunity which enabled the Ba'thists to widen their popular support. A year later they joined the National Front which already included the *Istiqlal* (Independence) Party, the *Watani Al-Dimocrati* (National Democrats) and a number of Communist sympathisers.

Nationalist Reformist Parties

Before the Ba'thists and Communists wrested popular support from the other political groupings during the late forties and throughout the fifties, political opposition was chiefly led by bourgeois parties made up of professionals, bureaucrats, proprietors and young intellectuals. The main thrust of these parties was the elimination of

²⁸² *Ibid*, p. 731.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 687.

²⁸⁴ Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 236.

²⁸⁵ Batatu, *Social Classes.*, p. 815. The Arab Bath Socialist Party (ABSP) was known as the Arab Bath Party. The word 'Socialist' was added following the merger in 1957 between the Arab Bath Party and the Arab Socialist Party. For more details see *Ibid.*, pp. 722ff.

²⁸⁶ Shbbar, *Party Political Work*, p. 228.

corruption in government, liberalising civil laws, the organising of free elections and the termination of political and military ties with Britain.²⁸⁷ These parties included nationalist *Al-Istiqlal* (Independence), the leftist *Al-Sha'b* (the People), socialist *Al-Watani Al-Dimocrati* (National Democrats) and others. Despite the fact that they were no more than a handful of individuals with enough resources to publish dailies carrying their own vision of the future, they nevertheless played a significant part in mobilising people and focusing public opinion on national issues. The poorer strata of the masses did not feel particularly attracted to the mild programmes of those bourgeois groupings and remained a little suspicious of their aims.

Al-Istiqlal (Independence) Party

This nationalist Party was established in 1946 and its founding members included a number of middle-class intellectuals who were not new to the political scene in Iraq. Some had in fact been members of other political parties before. Chief among the aims which the *Istiqlalis* sought to achieve were Arab unity and the support of Arab countries in their struggle to gain independence. Special attention was given to the question of Palestine. Through its organ *Liwa' Al-Istiqlal* (Independence Banner) impassioned editorials condemning the Jewish state and calling for the reinstating of the Palestinians consistently appeared consistently appeared.

The *Istiqlal* Party reached its highest point of popularity in 1948 when, following the creation of the state of Israel, it led massive protest demonstrations and helped in the effort to secure financial support and recruit volunteers to take part in operations

²⁸⁷ Al-Hassou, *Struggle for Power*, p. 70.

against the Israelis.²⁸⁸ Although its political influence was widely acknowledged, the party never really took root among the masses. These were more interested in populist revolutionary movements than in traditional party ideologies or bourgeois mentality. The Istiqlalis did not appeal to post World War II Iraq which was witnessing a historic phase in which dramatic events followed one upon the other in the Arab world: the Partition Plan of Palestine, the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, the Egyptian coup of Gamal Abdul Nassir, the eruption of the Algerian Revolution, nationalisation of the Suez Canal and its aftermath, the expulsion of British army officers from Jordan, the Soviet-Egyptian arms deal, U. S. marines "landing" in Lebanon to thwart a pro-Nasserite uprising and America's use of World Bank loans to blackmail Nasser into submission.

Although few in number, those lawyers and foreign-educated intellectuals continued to wield considerable influence from the day the Party was founded until it dissolved itself or rather it died a natural death in the early sixties. The *Istiqlalis* were signatories of the National Front of 1954 and that of 1957. They also managed to win a number of parliamentary seats in the 1954 election. When the 1958 coup took place, the founder of the party, Muhammad Mahdi Kubba was chosen to join the three-man-Presidency Council which was, at least in theory, the highest executive office during the Qassim era with full Presidential authority.

Al-Hizb Al-Watani Al-Dimocrati (National Democratic Party)

This mildly socialist but essentially conservative Western-type party was founded by Kamil Al-Chadirchi and others who were mainly upper middle class lawyers,

²⁸⁸ Shubbar, *Party Political Work.*, pp. 195-7.

enlightened social dignitaries and land owners in 1946. Most of the founding members were members of the *Ahali* group which had come to prominence following General Bakr Sidqi's coup behind which they stood. In this newly formed grouping they continued more or less to work for the same objective: socialism and democracy. The party however suffered from internal divisions. Some of the more zealous members, such as Abdul-Wahab Mahmud who later became Secretary General of the Law Society under General Qassim, and Kamil Qazanchi, President of the other Communist front, the Peace Partisans, felt compelled to leave the party and join the Communists when they realised that Chadirchi and his two associates Hussein Jamil and Muhammad Hadid would not budge. When the 1958 coup took place General Qassim heavily relied on the support of this party and offered cabinet posts to its members, sympathisers or ex-members.²⁸⁹ With the end of the first Republican regime, this party whose members, though not Chadirchi himself, were identified with General Qassim, became moribund, and with Chadircchi's death in the late sixties the party has never been heard of.²⁹⁰

Hizb Al-Sha'b (People's Party)

Al-Sha'b Party was at first a secret organisation which circulated anti government pamphlets among its members and sympathisers who were like the *Istiqlalis* and the National Democrats drawn from the educated well-to-do stratum of the middle class. Founded in 1942 the Party was not licensed until 1946. Two opposed factions surfaced within the leadership of the Party from the beginning: a Marxist group which openly called for the adoption of socialism as a guiding ideology and a less radical

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.

one which counselled moderation and gradual reform. The internal division however did not last long. In 1947 the government, accusing the Party of engaging in clandestine subversive activities and of receiving financial support from "unknown sources", withdrew its license and forced the Party to go underground. Soon after most of the radical elements joined the Communist camp while the rest preferred to leave politics altogether.²⁹¹

Al-Dhubbat Al-Ahrar (Free Officers)

The acute disappointment felt by Iraqis of all walks of life, particularly young officers, at the humiliating outcome of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, deterioration of the political situation at home and the success of Nasser's coup in Egypt encouraged a number of military officers to form a secret organisation with the specific aim of toppling the royal regime. It is now accepted that the earliest "cell" of this secret organisation was formed in September 1952, hardly two months after Nasser's coup. Captain Rifa't Al-Haj Sirri and Lieutenant Colonel Rajab Abdul Majid started recruiting young officers into the new organisation which the then Brigadier Abdul Karim Qassim and later Colonel Abdul Salam Aref joined two years later.²⁹² The plotting officers did not have a specific ideology or a well defined agenda. The officers, who included nationalists, leftists and others with Islamist orientation, had only one overriding concern: to topple the pro-British royal regime at any cost. In point of fact there was disagreement even on this issue. The then colonel Isma'il Al-

²⁹⁰ Nadhmi, *Political Development*, p. 189.

²⁹¹ Shubbar, *Party Political Work.*, pp. 197.

²⁹² Isma'il Al-Aref, *Asrar Thawrat 14 Tammuz Wa Ta'sis Al-Jumhuriyah Fil Iraq (Secrets of the 14th July Revolution and the Establishment of the Republic in Iraq)* (London: Lana Publications, 1986), pp.101-03.

²⁹² Shubbar, *Party Political Work.*, pp. 197

Aref who was the first officer to approach the Abul-Karim Qassim and ask him to join the secret organisation states that :

During 1955 the free officers started to discuss the fate of the monarchy and form of government they intend to establish in Iraq. In these discussions two trends surfaced. Some officers wanted to end the monarchy, declare Iraq a republic immediately the revolution achieves success and form a Revolution Command Council which is to be entrusted with running the affairs of state for a short period of time after which a popular government democratically elected should take over all responsibilities. Other officers held a different view. These sought to preserve the monarchy for a while and then eliminate the crown regent and Nuri Al-Said and his clique according to what the Revolution Command Council saw fit. Once the new regime is firmly established Iraq may then be declared a republic either through a referendum or a decree to be issued by the Revolution Command Council.²⁹³

Although no specific programme had been agreed upon before the army officers won power, it became evident during the first weeks of the Republic that the new regime sought, amongst other things, to fight the land owners and put an end to the age-old laws governing cultivable land, untie the Iraqi Dinar from the Sterling, abrogation of the Baghdad Pact Treaty, establish full diplomatic relations with the then socialist bloc, free all political prisoners and, in short, to give Iraqis an opportunity to run their own affairs and improve their living conditions.²⁹⁴

Despite the lack of real discipline and numerous loopholes which characterised the Free Officers Organisation, these few middle-ranking officers, whose conspiratorial movement was more than once betrayed or discovered²⁹⁵, managed to execute one of

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁹⁴ Al-Alawi, *Abdul-Karim Qassim*, pp. 128-30.

²⁹⁵ Detailed descriptions of these and other close shaves are provided by Al-Aref, *Secrets*, pp. 124, 128-132.

the easiest and most successful coups in modern history against a regime that had several mutual defence treaties with its neighbours and was closely bound with Western powers. The reasons for the unexpected success are not difficult to discern. Resentment with the uncritically pro Western policies of Baghdad especially in the post-Baghdad Pact years, the Communist propaganda machine, which was churning out endless accusations and allegations, the dangerous spread of "a little knowledge", which made many Iraqis susceptible to elegant-sounding slogans, the rise of Arab nationalism following the 1952 coup in Egypt and Nasser's manipulation of the state-owned mass media and his highly effective and emotive rhetoric which cast a spell on the listeners and inflamed the imagination of millions of Arabs east and West of Suez ripened the political climate and made the Iraqis yearn for change. Another factor which made the coup possible was the fact that the Security apparatus was not as pervasive, intrusive or as indeed half as ruthless as it was later to become in Republican Iraq when under President Saddam Hussein, it became a government above the government.

The Islamic Opposition: The Muslim Brotherhood

Many of the leading figures in the political parties during the occupation and Mandate years were religious men who espoused patriotism with their religious mission. *Fatwas* against the British were issued and in their weekly *khutbas* (sermons) they often enjoined the faithful to fight British colonialism and expel foreign influence from Iraq. Far from being modern political parties, the religious groupings, which had earlier resisted Ottoman rule were soon to direct their criticism towards the British-installed government. Their methods remained practically unchanged as they confined their activities to places of worship and public occasions. The religious

movement however did not organise itself into modern political parties until after the end of World War II when the government promulgated the Parties and Societies Law, which legalised all political parties, except the Communists.

The Muslim Brotherhood was among the first Islamic parties licensed to operate in Iraq in 1948. It was in a way an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and was therefore exclusively Sunni. Although the Muslim Brotherhood attacked Britain, Zionism and corruption in their organ *Al-Hisab* (The Reckoning), they were not considered a serious threat to the government. They were in general tolerated or were not in any sense persecuted until 1959 when the leader of the Party, Muhammad Hamid Al-Sawwaf, who had gone underground after 1958, was accused of treason for conspiring to oust General Qassim and condemned to death in absentia.²⁹⁶ Following the 1968 coup however most of the *Ikhwan* leaders were physically eliminated.²⁹⁷

Hizb Al-Tahrir Al-Islami (Islamic Liberation Party)

More ambitious and aggressive than the Muslim Brotherhood was the Hizb Al-Tahreer *Al-Islami*, which was founded in Iraq shortly after its establishment in Jerusalem in 1952. There were in fact no organisational links between the Party and Jerusalem. The founders of the party simply emulated the methods of the then Jordan-based party and operated quite independently of Jerusalem. *Al-Tahrir* Party was more vociferous in its criticism of the contemporary affairs than were the Muslim Brotherhood, which enabled it to win over many of the Brotherhood's young and enthusiastic members, whose thirst for rebellion had not been satisfied by its rather

²⁹⁶ Shubbar, *Party Political Work*, pp. 252ff; Al-Aref, *Secrets*, p. 376.

conservative leadership. Despite repeated attempts at obtaining a license to operate openly in the country, the party remained underground until the late sixties when it left the political scene completely after the detention and later execution of the mastermind behind the party, Hussein Al-Adhami.²⁹⁸

Hizb Al-Da'wah Al-Islamiya (Islamic Call)

While the Muslim Brotherhood and the *Tahrir* were entirely Sunni parties, the *Da'wah Al-Islamiya* was exclusively Shi'a. This party which was to play a significant part in later years, was established in Najaf in late 1957²⁹⁹ by a number of prominent Shi'a clerics including Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr. Al-Sadr's execution at the hands of President Saddam Hussein's regime is still commemorated throughout many parts of the Shi'a world particularly in Iran with which Al-Sadr had close contacts. Throughout the years 1958-1968 *Al-Da'wah* Party concentrated on building its power base particularly among school teachers and young government civil servants, many of whom were given grants and scholarships to pursue higher education at its two front institutions *Kulliyat Al-Fiqh* (College of Islamic Jurisprudence) in Najaf and *Kulliyat Usul Al-Deen* (College of Islamic Principles) in Baghdad³⁰⁰.

High Tide of Opposition and State Responses

Compared with the waves of executions, use of poison gas and physical elimination of all political opposition in Republican Iraq, particularly since the Ba'thist so called

²⁹⁷ Hasan Al-Saeed, *Nawateer Al-Gharb: Safahat min Mallaf Ilaqat Al-Lu'ba Al-Dawliya ma' Al-Ba'th Al-Iraqi 1948-1968 (Guardsmen of the West: Pages from the File on International Relations with Iraq's Ba'th 1948-1968)* (Beirut: Mu'asast Al-Wihda Lil Dirasat wa Al-Tawtheeq, 1992), p. 247.

²⁹⁸ Shubbar, *Party Political Work*, pp. 253-54.

²⁹⁹ Hasan Al-Saeed, *Gyardsmen*, p. 249.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

“White Revolution” of 1968, the measures taken against the clandestine groupings and political dissidents in monarchist Iraq appear quite moderate. This is despite the hanging of three members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the execution of the four colonels known as the “Golden Square” who had seized power and imposed the “National Defence” regime in 1941. Despite the charges Batatu levels against Nuri as-Sai'd and Crown Prince Abdul-Ilah in which he points out that these two men “were never tender with the lives of their people”³⁰¹, it is now widely accepted among Iraqis and non-Iraqis that the royal regime, for all its suppression of the opposition was indeed far less repressive than the regimes which succeeded it.³⁰²

During the fifties, with the possible exception of Nasser's UAR which offered much propaganda support but little material help to the Pan-Arab nationalists in Iraq, and the Soviet Union which granted those Communists who could make the journey to Moscow leave to remain, no power, regional or international extended any real assistance to the various Iraqi opposition groups. During the monarchist period, effecting a political change in Iraq was not on the agenda of the Western or even regional powers with many of which Iraq had close ties, particularly Turkey, Jordan and imperial Iran. Because both the UAR and the USSR considered the Baghdad Pact as a threat to their security, these two countries welcomed any Iraqis associated with the opposition. This explains why these two countries spared no time in recognising the new republican regime.³⁰³

Despite the scarcity of external support, the opposition was very much alive and

³⁰¹ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 802.

³⁰² Interview with Iraqi National Accord Assembly leader Salah Omar Al-Ali in London on February 9th 1998.

active inside the country albeit under the surface for much of the time. Under the royal regime it was not really dangerous for Iraqis to be known as sympathisers with this political grouping or that. Most University students for example did not hide their political preferences or even their affiliations although they knew that there were, as one might expect, informers amongst them. Even military officers, the supposed defenders of the regime, often expressed criticism of the government without much fear.³⁰⁴

Ebb of Civilian Opposition 1958-1968

The 1958 revolution unleashed the long suppressed opposition to the unpopular regime. Soon after the new inexperienced rulers had embarked upon the destruction of one institution after another in a series of hasty decrees and unstudied moves, the general public grew more disillusioned about what the coup could bring about. The rift between the Arab nationalists who were impatient to declare a merger with the former United Arab Republic and the Communists who saw in such a move a deadly blow to their ambitions became so intense that in 1959 bloody clashes between these two camps and their sympathisers occurred in Mosul and later in Kirkuk. During the five years that followed the coup each of these two factions worked assiduously to win the military government to its side. Throughout this period the public steadily grew more disenchanted with politics and political change. From 1963, when General Qassim's regime was toppled in a bloody coup at the hands of a few Ba'thist and nationalist officers, to the 1968 so-called "White Revolution" which brought Saddam

³⁰³ Al-Zubaidi, Laith Abdul-Hasan, *Thawrat 14 Tammuz Fil Iraq (14th July Revolution in Iraq)*, 2nd ed., (Baghdad: Dar Al-Yaqdha Al-Arabiya, 1981), p. 210.

Hussein to power, political opposition was a costly and dangerous game almost exclusively played by the military, with the public mainly as onlookers.

The Iraqi opposition which had before the 1958 coup maintained at least a fragile front in the face of their common enemy, the royal regime, became deeply divided after General Qassim had shrewdly, if briefly, manipulated the acute rivalries between the political parties to remain in power. A few months after the coup, there appeared a great divide within Iraqi society which separated the Iraqi nationalists, who were the main supporters of the General and those Pan-Arabists who called for an immediate merger with Nasser's Egypt. The first group was led by the Communists and their supporters; the second by the Ba'thists. Qassim's reliance on the Iraqi Communist party to counter the influence of the Pan-Arabists made the latter potential enemies of his rule. On the other hand his vacillation and hesitation to give full reign to the Communists gradually eradicated the support of the Communists and weakened his own position. This policy of what May Chartouni Dubarry calls "systematic division" did not however salvage the worsening political situation which was awash with all sorts of rumours of impending coups at the hands of one potential putschist or another. Ironically, until the end of his regime General Qassim believed that no opposition party or grouping could topple him. He felt he could always rely on the armed forces as he did when he quelled the Shawwaf uprising in Mosul led by an adventurous Nasserite army colonel.³⁰⁵

Between 1958 and 1968, military officers were both the instigators and instruments of

³⁰⁴ Ismail Al-Aref, *Asrar Thawrat 14 Tammuz Wa Ta'sis Al-Jumhuriya Al-Iraqiya fi Al-Iraq (Secrets of the 14th July Revolution and the establishment of the Republic in Iraq)* (London: Lana Publications, 1986), p. 106.

all political change in Iraq. They

participated fully in the game of alliances and counter-alliances, coups and counter-coups the rules of which were defined by Qassim. For these parties, launched on their frantic course to power, the military leader or leaders represented both a trump and a central stake. The realisation of their ambitions has necessarily to cut across the alliance, either with the ruling faction (such as the support of the ICP [Iraqi Communist Party] for Qassim), or with a group of putschist officers (such as the alliance between the Ba'thists and the hard core of the pan-Arabist officers). All these parties seemed to support the principle of a coup d'état as an instrument of political change and thus contributed to the encouragement and reinforcement of factional struggles within the Iraqi army.³⁰⁶

All governments, which came to power between 1958 and 1968 were a result of coups, some quite bloody, carried out mostly by middle class military officers with close ties to the regime itself. Despite all claims to the contrary, the political parties were too weak to initiate a coup or start a popular uprising. Various coups were attempted against General Qassim by those who were his own comrades. The short-lived putsch of March 1959 in Mosul was planned and carried out exclusively by a few mostly middle-ranking officers headed by Qassim's colleague, Colonel Al-Shawwaf. Similarly, the declaration of the Second Republic following the 8th February 1963 coup was the work of disaffected young and ambitious officers, some of whom had a Ba'thist background. Nasser who had been openly calling upon the Iraqis to rise against the "Divider of Iraq"³⁰⁷ provided little more than fiery anti-Qassim radio commentaries read by the infamous Egyptian propagandist Ahmad Saeed.

³⁰⁵ May Chartouni Dubarry, *"The Development of Internal Politics in Iraq from 1958 to the Present Day"* in Hopwood, *Power And Society*, p. 26.

The 18th November 1963 coup was championed by Abdul Salam Aref and a few disgruntled Pan-Arabist officers who were in high positions during the first Ba'thist regime. Even the 1968 so-called 'White Revolution' against the Aref regime was in point of fact a plot executed mainly by those same officers with whom the security of the Aref regime had been entrusted: the Chief of Military Intelligence, Abdul Razzaq Al-Nayif and the Commander of the then Battalion of Republican Guards, Ibrahim Al-Dawoud. These regimes were not established on a wave of popular feeling and did not have any real support among the public. Their relatively easy success (and downfall) is attributed mainly to the fact that Iraq during the sixties had not yet known the ruthless security apparatus that was to launch violent onslaughts on any one whose loyalty was not guaranteed. During that troubled period, many Iraqis began to discover that politics was a dangerous game, one which was to turn fatal under Saddam Hussein's presidency. This meant that following the deep disappointment of the 1958 coup, most Iraqis came to lose all expectations that the new governments were capable or even willing to do much to improve their lot.

Opposition Parties 1968-1991

Apart from the struggle for power among the different factions within the Ba'th Party³⁰⁸, the period immediately after the 1968 coup was relatively quiet in so far as the opposition movement is concerned. Saddam's "White Revolution" set out to win over all potential rivals or enemies such as the Communists, the Nasserites and the Syrian oriented or so called "left wing Ba'thists" as well as a number of independent nationalists. In 1973 a National Progressive Front was formed. This included the

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 29-30.

ruling Ba'th Party, the Communist Party and the Kurdish Democratic Party. This political structure was just another "fron" which was not different from the other organisations such as the *Tala-ie* (Pioneers) for primary school children, *Futuwwa* (Vanguards) and *Kashaffa* (Scouts) for teenagers, *Shabab* (Youth) for the over eighteen year olds, and a host of other mass organisations intended to consolidate the Ba'th position in every sphere of life in the country and to block the infiltration of any ideologies or anti-Ba'thist political rivals into any social or economic stratum.³⁰⁹

While the Ba'th government managed to integrate wide sectors of Iraqi society into the Party proper, or into one of its front organisations, it failed to establish a solid base in the Shi'a strongholds of Najaf, Karbala, Kufa and the rest of the shrine cities of the country. These remained, for the most part, loyal to the religious leadership embodied in the Imams of Najaf to whom by tradition all the faithful among the Shi'a of the world turn for guidance.³¹⁰ Most inhabitants of these cities remained alienated and became increasingly sympathetic towards the one Shi'a party which stood up to the Ba'th regime, namely the *Hizb Al-Da'wah Al-Islamiya* (Islamic Call Party).³¹¹

The Communists

In their long political history in Iraq the Communists have, as pointed out earlier, passed through many ups and downs. At one point during the Qassim regime and

³⁰⁷ The Arabic name 'Qassim' means 'divider', hence the phrase.

³⁰⁹ Cf. Peter Heine, 'Political Parties, Institutions and Administrative Structures' in Hopwood, *Iraq: Power and Society*, pp. 44-5.

³¹⁰ Developments in Iran following Khomeini's takeover had produced the Shi'a holy city of Qum as a rival centre of Shi'a' religious authority.

again during the mid-seventies they held cabinet posts.³¹² At other times, they were ruthlessly hunted by the authorities. Throughout the period from 1934 until recently internal divisions and struggle for power characterised most of its activity. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc the, Iraqi Communist Party lost its lifeline and consequently much of its influence and popularity. Aziz Muhammad who headed the Central Committee for twenty eight years from 1967 to 1992 failed to adapt to the changing international and regional climate and was replaced by Hamid Majid Musa, a Shi'a party worker from the city of Hilla on the mid-Euphrates. Among the splinter groups which mushroomed, especially after the great rift of 1967 were: *Al-Kifah Al-Mussalah* (the Armed Stuggle) which was founded in 1969 by Aziz Al-Haj, *Munadhamat Jaish Al-Tahreer Al-Sha'bi* (People's Liberation Army Organisation) which was established in the mid sixties by Mu'een Hussein Al-Nahr; *Al-Munadhama Al-Markisiyya Al-Lininiyya* (the Marxist-Leninist Organization) which was founded in Damascus in 1976; *Al-Raya Al-Hamra'* (the Red Banner) which is devoted to the propagation of Che Guevara's tactics; *Harakat Al-Talee'a Al-Deemocratiya* (Democratic Pioneers Movement), founded in Baghdad in 1979, *Munadhamat Al-A'mal Al-Shiyou'i Al-Iraqi* (Iraqi Communist Action Organisation) which was established in Moscow in 1983 and a host of other mini groupings which were to leave the political arena following the collapse of Communism in Europe.

The Communists enjoyed wide popularity in the period immediately following the July 1958 Revolution. The USSR's stand vis-a-vis the "Tripartite Aggression" against Nasser, the sale of Czech arms to Egypt and the use of effective propaganda tactics

³¹² Communist Naziha Al-Dulaimi was the first Iraqi woman to join the cabinet in 1959. In 1973 Secretary General of the Communist Party Amer abdullah was appointed state minister. See Geof

won Communism and the Communist parties wide popularity. In Iraq, the Communists grew so influential following the July 1958 Revolution that General Qassim, at first himself a Communist sympathiser, felt threatened and towards the end of his regime turned against them. When the Ba'thists seized power in 1968, they made various accommodations with the Communist Party. These culminated in the appointment in May 1972 of two Communist leaders as cabinet members and the signing of the National and Patriotic Front Charter in July 1973.³¹³ But relations between the Ba'thists and the Communists were soon to turn sour. Hardly two months had passed than the Communist Party

was acknowledging that the Patriotic Front coalition had been transformed into an instrument of the Ba'th Party; in June the ICP Central Committee urged an end the Ba'th dictatorship and the creation of a democratic system of government in Iraq. Later in 1979 Communist partisans began activities in support of the Iraqi Kurds.³¹⁴

During the period between 1979 and the 1991 Gulf War, the Communists were subjected to ruthless suppression, which pushed most of its party cadres and members to seek refuge either in the marsh areas, Kurdistan or abroad, especially in Syria which supported practically any ant-Saddam activities.

The Islamists

Al-Da'wah Party

Although *Al-Da'wah* had been in existence even before the 1958 coup, its political activities were not felt until the late sixties. This exclusively Shi'a grouping was and

Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 294.

³¹³ Batatu, *Social Classes*, p. 1109.

³¹⁴ Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 286.

still is devoted to the toppling of the Ba'th regime and the establishment of a revolutionary Islamist government along the lines of Khomeini's Iran. In point of fact the two Imams, Al-Sadr and Khomeini, had a great deal in common when it came to political action and the means of achieving their aims. From the very beginning the *Al-Da'wah* party encouraged confrontational tactics. Although during the Qassim era it had adopted a more or less wait-and-see attitude in which its main activities were directed not against the Qassim regime but against the Communist party in an attempt to resist what was then called "the Communist Tide", the *Da'wah* Party changed its tactics and became increasingly more violent in the period following the 1968 coup.³¹⁵

When relations between Ba'thist Iraq and the Shah's Iran deteriorated into a grave crisis following the Shah's unilateral abrogation of the 1937 Treaty governing the partition of the Shat-Al-Arab waterway, the Ba'thists, who had yet to establish their firm hold over the country, turned to the Shi'a religious leadership for help. Baghdad wanted the Najaf Imams to mediate between Iraq and Iran in order to avert an imminent confrontation. When no positive response was obtained a ruthless campaign of terror was launched against all Shi'a institutions, organisations and individuals. The measures included among other things: appropriation of funds, closure of religious schools and colleges, mass deportation of Iraqis of Iranian origins, imprisonment and execution of Shi'a activists.³¹⁶ Special attention was given to the armed forces to ensure complete obedience:

³¹⁵ Ali Al-Mu'min, *Sanawat Al-Jamr: Masirat Al-Haraka Al-Islamiya Fil Iraq 1957-1986 (Smoldering Years: Development of the Islamist Movement in Iraq 1957-1986)* (London: Dar Al-Masira, 1993), pp. 217ff.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 92.

The ubiquity of Ba'thist commissars in all units, the appointments of officers whose qualification was loyalty to Saddam Hussein, rather than military competence, the rapid rotation of officers to ensure that they formed no bonds of solidarity either with each other or with the men under their command. . . had been the techniques whereby loyalty, or at least absence of effective conspiracy had been assured.³¹⁷

More repressive measures were introduced following the success of Khomeini's takeover. Early in 1980 the Revolution Command Council deemed it an act of treason to join the Da'wah Party and all members, real or suspected, were executed almost without any trial.³¹⁸ When the Iraq-Iran war broke out, the Ba'thist regime did its utmost to limit the damage and scope of operations carried out by the military wing of Da'wah Party which claimed responsibility for a number of operations against Iraqi forces along the Iraq-Iran border as well as the shelling or bombing of many strategic sites throughout Iraq and abroad.³¹⁹ Among the many spectacular operations were the bombing of the Iraqi Embassy in Beirut, the headquarters of the Iraqi Air Force, the Baghdad Broadcasting Station and the Ministry of Planning which was almost adjacent to the Republican Palace and General Intelligence installations.

Commenting on the role of the Da'wah Party in opposing Saddam Hussein's regime Ali Al-Mu'min asserts that the Da'wah Party

was aware of Saddam's intention of waging war with the help of foreign as well as the Shah's ex-military experts. It therefore hastened to notify the Islamic leadership in Iran of these plans. The Islamist officers within the Iraqi armed forces

³¹⁷ Charles Tripp, 'The Iran-Iraq War and the Iraqi State' in Hopwood, *Iraq: Power and Society*, p. 104.

³¹⁸ For the text of the decree see Abdul Hamid AlAbbasi, *Safahat Sawda' Min Ba'th Al-Iraq (Black Pages From Ba'thist Iraq)* (London: Dar Al-Turath Al-Arabi, 1988), II, p. 297.

³¹⁹ Al-Ittihad Al-Islami Li Turkoman Al-Iraq, *Al-Kharita Al-Siyasiya LilMu'aradga Al-Iraqiya Ardhun wa Tahlil(The Political Map of Iraqi Opposition: Survey and Analysis)* (Qum:Dar Al-Dalil Lilsahafa wal Nashr, 1994), p. 40.

too did their utmost to provide details of the plan to the Islamic Republic. Despite repeated warnings by the Iraqi Islamists, and for many reasons related to the internal situation prevalent in Iran then, the government of Abu Hasan Bani Sadr [President of Iran at the time] failed to take any precautionary measures to resist the imminent Iraqi offensive.³²⁰

The anti-war attitude adopted by the Da'wah Party incensed the Ba'thist regime and prompted it to invent new methods of torture and suppression. The party's uncritically pro-Khomeini stand may be seen in one of the pamphlets in which the Party declares that its war against the Baghdad regime would continue even if "the Islamic Republic of Iran agreed to a cease-fire".³²¹ Such an attitude cost the Party and its sympathisers dearly: countless children were orphaned, thousands of women widowed and still many more people found themselves both homeless and stateless as they were dumped en masse at the border with Iran or flown out of the country to Cyprus.³²² The long arm of the Iraqi Intelligence service reached far and wide. A number of leading figures were executed in Lebanon, Iran, the United Arab Emirates and Sudan. On the other hand, political pressure was exerted on foreign countries to extradite Da'wah members.³²³

The severity with which the Da'wah party and other dissident groups were treated 'gives no real indication of the strength of Shi'a opposition. It was, as Peter and Marion Sluglett put it,

more indicative of the regime's absolute determination not to permit the formation of the smallest pocket of dissent either there [the Shi'a Holy Cities] or anywhere else in the country. In consequence it is,

³²⁰ Al-Mumin, *Smouldering Years*, p. 228.

³²¹ Al-Mu'min, *Smouldering Years*, p. 232.

³²² The two volumes of Al-Abbasi's *Black Pages from Ba'this Iraq* include gruesome details of unimaginable methods of torture which the author alleges to have based on real experiences and eyewitness accounts.

³²³ Al-Mu'min, *Smouldering Years*, p. 233.

extremely difficult to make any but the most tentative assessment of the extent of Shi'a opposition as a phenomenon, and in particular of the appeal of such parties as *Al-Da'wa* outside the traditional religious centres, particularly in the Shi'a agglomerations in Baghdad.³²⁴

By and large, Al-Da'wah Party has proved to be the most active Shi'a opposition group in Iraq. To achieve its objectives, the party adopted a four-stage strategy. The first, described as the intellectual phase necessitated the study of the Qura'n, the Traditions and the education of the party cadres in the ways of Islam so as to immunize and safeguard their followers against secular aberrations. The second was the political phase, which is intended to introduce members to the realities of political work. Seizing power was the third stage, while government and supervision constituted the fourth and last phase.³²⁵ The adoption of staged political work had a negative impact on the party in that leaders of the Da'wah were so obsessed with adhering to this strategy, which they firmly believed to have been followed by the early Muslims, that little progress was achieved. What confounded this internationalist party's programme was the fact that each Islamic country had its own specific circumstances, which required a different political agenda. Preoccupation with the four-stage strategy, furthermore, made it quite difficult for the party to crystallize a comprehensive political theory.³²⁶

There are of course a range of Shi'a opposition movements and parties attempting to unseat the regime of Saddam Hussein. These include:

³²⁴ Peter Sluglett and Marion Farouk-Sluglett, "Sunnis and Shi'as Revisited: Sectarianism and Ethnicity in Authoritarian Iraq" in Hopwood, *Iraq: Power and Society*, p. 88.

³²⁵ Adel Raouf, *Al-Asmal Al-Islami Fi Al-Iraq: Qiraa Naqdiya Li-Masirat Nisf Qarn 1950-2000 (Islamic Action in Iraq: A Critical Reading of Developments Over Half a Century 1950-2000)* (Damascus: Al-Markaz Al-Iraqi Lil-Dirasat Wa Al-Ilam, 2000), pp. 186ff.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

Al-Majlis Al-A'la Lil-Thawta Al-Islamiyya fi Al-Iraq (Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq)

When it was first created in Tehran in 1982, the Council was originally envisaged to provide an umbrella organization under which all Islamic opposition groups would operate. The Council, which is strongly backed by the Islamic government of Iran, has a military wing, which actively participated in the Iraq-Iran war, fighting on Iran's side. Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir Al-Hakim, who created the Council, is still at the head of its organizational structure. *Al-Shahadah* (Martyrdom) which is published weekly in Tehran is the official central organ of the Council.

The *Majlis*, created and based in Iran, looked upon the Islamic revolution as a source of inspiration and model to be emulated in every respect. Just as the Islamic movement in Iran had posited Khomeini as a leader and symbol of the revolution, the *Majlis* also strove to find its own "symbol" to lead the Iraqi Islamic project. To that end, it chose Muhammad Baqir Al-Hakim, son of Ayat Ullah Muhsin Al-Hakim, the Najaf-based *Marji' A'la* (supreme Shi'a cleric) during the sixties and seventies. The choice of the energetic Baqir Al-Hakim to be at the head of the *Majlis* brought immediate political advantages. Many religious Imams and ordinary Iraqis soon joined the *Majlis*, attracted mainly by the religious and social weight the younger Hakim carried.³²⁷

Munadhammat Al-'Amal Al-Islami (Organization of Islamic Action)

This organization was created in 1976 by Muhammad Taqi Al-Muddarissi, Sheikh

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

Muhsin Al-Husaini, Kamal Al-Haidari and other Iraqi expatriates particularly those living in Kuwait. Its headquarters moved immediately the Khomeini regime seized power in Iran. Unlike the Da'wah Party, which, as stated above, has a four stage-strategy to achieve its objective of seizing power in Iraq, the *Munadhama* seeks to achieve the same objective through armed struggle which it believes should constitute the only stage to rid Iraq of its present rulers. To indoctrinate its members in its revolutionary ideology, of burning and nullifying the four stages, the Munadhama placed great emphasis on the concept of *Jihad* (holy war) and has published a number of pamphlets, the most important of which is *Hay Alal Jihad* (Respond to the Call of Jihad).³²⁸ The organization carried out a number of suicide missions in Iraq during the late seventies and early eighties. Internal divisions however have weakened the organization which has managed to open many branches in Iraqi Kurdistan as well as the Gulf states, especially in Bahrain and in some Iranian cities.³²⁹

Harakat Jund Al-Imam (The Imam's Soldiers Movement)

This is a splinter group which rebelled against the Da'wah Party in 1969. It was created in Baghdad by Sami Al-Badri who, unlike the leadership of the Da'wah party which concentrated on violent political action, wanted more emphasis on religious education and specifically the dedication of the movement to the ennobling of the "awaited Imam" after which the movement is named. The leaders of the movement are mainly based in Damascus and London.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 261ff.

³²⁹ Adel Raouf, "Munadhamat Al-Amal Al-Islami: Al-Ta'sees Wa Al-Maseera" (Organisation of Islamic Action: Foundation and Development", *Dirasat Iraqiya (Iraqi Studies)*, vol. 11, 1999, p. 6.

Harakat Al-Mujahidin Al-Iraqiyyn (Iraqi Fighters' Movement)

This movement was created in Damascus in 1980. It is particularly dedicated to violence and is said to have been behind a number of suicide missions in Iraq. Following the execution of its leaders, most of its cadres joined the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution and assumed high offices there.

Al-Da'wah Al-Islamiya (Islamic Call)

In 1980, many members of the Basrah branch of Da'wah Party rebelled against their superiors and formed their own grouping, dropping the word hizb (party) from their newly formed organization. This splinter group has managed to enlist the support of Tehran.

Al-Tajamu' Al-Islami Al-Iraqi (Iraqi Islamic Grouping)

The *Tajammu'* was created in the late eighties in London. This opposition group is more like a forum than a political organization. Muhammad Bahr Al-Ulum is a pivotal character in the Grouping which like many of the opposition groups in Iraq has no real popular base.

Al-Haraka Al-Islamiya Fil Iraq (Islamic Movement in Iraq)

This movement also known as *Al-Khalissiyoun* (followers of Al-Khalissi) was established by the sons of the late Sheikh Mahdi Al-Khalisi who had fought against the British during the occupation period. This Shi'a movement has inherited the good relations which the late Khalissi, through his moderation and vision, had cultivated with the Sunni politicians and religious men in Iraq. The movement is based in London. It has close links with Damascus.

Harakat Al-Wifaq Al-Islami (Islamic Accord Movement)

This movement which was established in 1980 was almost exclusively devoted to the defense of those Iraqis who were deported en masse during the late sixties when the Ba'thists came to power and during the early eighties when the relations between Iraq and Iran deteriorated into a protracted armed struggle. Chief among its aims is the defense of the cause of those deported to whose interests the movement is allegedly devoted. *Al-Wifaq Al-Islami*, which had earlier been called the *Muhajjareen* (the Deportees), was first based in Tehran but later moved to Damascus.

Nationalist and Pan-Arab Opposition

The vast majority of the leaders of Pan-Arab opposition parties who took part in the effort to unseat the regime of Saddam Hussein in the period following the invasion of Kuwait are either ex-Ba'thists, ex-military officers or ex-members of the Arab nationalist party, *Al-Istiklal* (Independence), which was supplanted after the 1958 Revolution by the more radical and staunchly populist Ba'th party. The main opposition groups which will be taken up shortly are: *Al-Hizb Al-Ishtiraki* (the Socialist Party), *Al-Haraka Al-Ishtirakiyya Al-Arabiyya* (Arab Socialist Movement) and *Al-Tajamm' Al-Qawmi Al-Dimocrati* (Democratic Nationalist Grouping).

Some of the nationalist activists, such as Mubdir Al-Wayyis, leader of the *Hizb Al-Ishtiraki* (Socialist Party) had taken part in one or more of the military coups in Iraq during the turbulent decade 1958-1968. Others such as Abdul-Ilah Al-Nasrawi, leader of *Al-Haraka Al-Ishtirakiyya Al-Arabiyya* (Arab Socialist Movement) and Ahmad Al-Haboubi, leader of *Al-Tajamm' Al-Qawmi Al-Dimocrati* (Democratic Nationalist Grouping) were quite active during the late fifties and sixties and held cabinet and

other distinguished political posts. Many of the Pan-Arab nationalists joined the the Iraqi chapter of the Nasserite Arab Socialist Union . Unlike its Egyptian Nasserite prototype, the short-lived Iraqi counterpart, which had been envisaged as an umbrella organisation for all Arab nationalists, never really took root and remained an ineffectual organisation besotted by division, personal jealousies and lack of direction. When, following the 1968 coup, the Arab Socialist union was finally dissolved, many of its members left the country either for Syria or Egypt, where most of the present nationalist parties were founded.³³⁰

Al-Hizb Al-Ishtiraki (The Socialist Party)

This is basically a Nasserite party. When it was first established in Baghdad in 1966 it was envisaged as a nucleus for all nationalist socialist Arab movements striving for unity and the establishment of socialism. Its leadership which is now based in Syria publishes *Al-Ishtiraki* (the Socialist) which is the official organ of this dwindling grouping. *Al-Hizb Al-Ishtiraki* is now associated with Mubdir Al-Wayyis who was a military officer of junior rank when he left Baghdad following involvement in a failed attempt in June 1966 to oust President Abdul-Rahman Aref. Al-Wayyis attended most of the conferences held by the opposition abroad.

Al-Haraka Al-Ishtirakiyya Al-Arabiyya (Arab Socialist Movement)

Al-Haraka, which is now based in Lebanon, has no specific ideology other than the implementation of what is called "Arab socialism" and the glorification of Nasserism. Its figure head is Abdul-Ilah Al-Nasrawi who has maintained good relations with both

³³⁰ Muhammad Jamal Barout, *Harakat Al-Qawmiyeen Al-Arab (Arab Nationalist Movement)* (Damascus: Markaz Al-Dirasat Al-Strateejiya, 1997), p. 288.

Arab and Kurdish leaderships. Al-Nasrawi played a prominent role in the feeble Nasserite organisation, the Arab socialist Union, which was, theoretically at least, "the ruling party" during the mid-sixties.³³¹

Al-Tajamm' Al-Qawmi Al-Dimocrati (Democratic Nationalist Grouping)

This is another Nasserite entity. Established in Cairo during the eighties, it is now mainly associated with Ahmad Al-Haboubi, a Shi'a Arab nationalist who had held a cabinet post twice during the Brothers Aref regime. In 1968, Al-Haboubi left Baghdad for Cairo where he continued to live until the early nineties when he began to shuttle between London and Cairo. The main activities of this "grouping" is issuing statements on major Arab developments.

Foreign Influence

While regional and international powers played little or no role in supporting or influencing Iraqi opposition during the period from the establishment of national rule up to the 1968 Ba'thist coup, foreign involvement in Iraqi opposition increased from the late seventies onward. The first country to support, organise and even arm opposition groups was Iran. Khomeini and Rafsanjani who had spent several years in Najaf and had cultivated strong ties with many Shi'a groups opened up the newly established Islamic Republic to a variety of Shi'a opposition groups.

Syria, on the other hand, which was accused by Saddam Hussein of plotting to overthrow his regime in July 1979, became a refuge for all so-called "leftist" Ba'thists or Syrian Wingers as well as for some independents and Communists. Syria's

³³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 244ff.

blockage of the export of Iraqi oil in 1981 and its pro-Iranian stand during the eight year war between Iraq and Iran undermined Syria's popularity in the eyes of the Iraqis who were battling it out with the Khomeini regime and who were struggling to survive. Inevitably this attitude would reflect negatively on all opposition groups supported by Damascus. The huge propaganda machine in Baghdad succeeded in etching even deeper Syria's image among the Iraqi masses as an Un-Arab state.

The fact that some Iraqi opposition groups were embraced by Tehran and Damascus tarnished the reputation and standing of Iraqi opposition in the international scene. These two countries were high on the list of the states supporting terrorism. Small wonder then that the Iraqi dissident groups failed to elicit the sympathy and support of many states in the region, Europe, the United States and elsewhere. With the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq hostilities, Iran and Syria played an even more active role in supporting Iraqi opposition groups. Both countries of course had vested interests in the opposition movement. They were seeking to extract maximum advantage of the groupings, which they supported and working towards the achievement of their own hidden agendas.³³²

The social tensions and special circumstances surrounding the creation and development of the modern state of Iraq were clearly reflected in the Iraqi opposition movement over the period extending from independence in 1932 to the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The emergence of Iraq as a political entity following World War I was the result of the accelerated development of numerous powers within Iraqi society. Iraqi nationalism, Pan-Arabism as well as rise of Islamic tendencies and the

³³² Interview with INC Executive Council President Chalabi in London on 11th September 1999.

concept of *Jihad* (holy war) went, singly and collectively, to form an effective opposition to foreign hegemony over Iraq. The efforts exerted in the years that followed British occupation were crowned with the declaration of Iraq as a unified independent entity.

Political Islam emerged for the first time in Iraq during British occupation. Both Sunni and Shi'a Islam played a significant part in opposing British policies in Iraq. The most important role played by the traditional religious circles was leading the 1920 Revolt against British domination. But the impact of religious movements ebbed following independence and the end of a British military presence in Iraq. Between independence in 1932 and the end of the monarchy in 1958, the main objective of the religious opposition (both Shi'a and Sunni) was not to seize power but to fight against the dangers which, from its own point of view, posed serious threats to the fabric of Iraqi society. Throughout the fifties and sixties, these threats were increasingly seen in the spread of secular ideologies, especially in the rise of Communist influence and, from the early sixties onwards, that of the Ba'thists.

On the other hand, the aim of the secular opposition, such as Pan-Arab nationalist Ba'thists or Internationalist Communist Party or the then pro-Nasser groupings, was to seize political power as that was considered the only means to effect fundamental reforms of the political system. Generally speaking, the sectarian, religious and racial differences played little or no part in shaping the policy or defining the leadership of these groups.³³³ Most of these parties included Sunnis and Shi'as, Arabs and Kurds, Christians and Muslims at the helm. This state of affairs contrasts with the situation

that obtained following the success of the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the start of Saddam Hussien's presidency, the two significant events which were to have undeniable effects on the Sunni-Shi'a rivalry and consequently on the course of Iraqi opposition. The immense impact of these two events may be summarized as follows:

1. The Ba'th Party, especially Saddam Hussein's regime, adopted a highly anti-clerical secular attitude, which opposed all forms of religious ideologies. It also sought, and to a large extent succeeded, in marginalising if not silencing the traditional religious leaderships. In so doing, the Ba'thists were attempting to nationalize religion and impose the will of the state on all aspects of religious activities.
2. The regime constantly sought to end the traditional independence of the religious Shi'a institutions and leaderships, especially those of Najaf and Karbala. It aimed to replace loyalty to the spiritual leader with allegiance to the head of the regime. To that end, it imposed a total ban on the age-old Shi'a communal rituals and celebrations, considering them a form of unacceptable political protest.
3. With the deterioration of Iraq's relations with Iran, the Baghdad regime enforced a number of measures aimed at lessening the traditional Iranian influence in Iraq. These included extremely harsh punishments, imprisonment, confiscation of assets and deportation.
4. The success of the Iranian revolution in 1979 was seen by the Baghdad regime as a strategic threat to its very existence. Its survival instinct pushed it to resort to

³³³ Nazih N. Ayubi, *Overstating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), p. 112.

extremely harsh and inhuman methods to crush any sign of dissent among the Shi'a and to commit atrocities in order that it may be spared a similar fate to that of the exterminated regime of the Shah.

5. The resounding victory of the Iranian revolution, on the other hand, inspired Iraqi Shi'a leaders and encouraged them to engage in clandestine political activities in the hope that an Islamic republic in Iraq might be established on the ruins of the Ba'thist regime.
6. On account of the long protracted Iraqi-Syrian conflict, Damascus embraced the Shi'a and Kurdish opposition in order to apply pressure on the regime in Baghdad. The strategic alliance between Syria and Iran, on the other hand, which was at least in part designed to weaken the Iraqi regime, was a constant source of worry to Baghdad. The price of this worry was more than amply paid by the Shi'a opposition. What further aggravated the situation was the eruption in 1980 of hostilities between Iraq and Iran and its development into what the Iraqi regime called a "war of destiny". Throughout the eight-year confrontation Khomeini insisted that toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein and the establishment of an Islamic republic in Iraq were pre-requisites for ending the war.

Throughout the period under discussion, the opposition movement was primarily aimed at reforming the political and economic systems, establishing political and economic independence of the state, and achieving social justice. In so far as Iraq's Arab policy is concerned, the opposition consistently attacked the position of successive governments on the Palestinian question. There were basic differences as to the definition of the highest interests of the Arab nation. On Iraq's relations with the great powers, the opposition attacked the policies of political or military alliances

during the Cold War. More specifically, Iraq's close ties with the West during the monarchist regime were under constant attack. On the other hand, the constant tilt towards the Eastern bloc during the period from the proclamation of the republic to the invasion of Kuwait was especially singled out for severe and hostile criticism.

Chapter 4: Iraqi Opposition: from the Invasion of Kuwait to the Vienna

Conference 1992

This chapter deals with the immediate aftermath of the 2nd Gulf War which, among other things, defeated Saddam Hussein and evicted his forces from Kuwait. The chapter starts by discussing the reasons behind Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait then moves on to investigate the various factors which led to the immense success and also the sudden fall of the popular revolt referred to as *Intifadat Aathar* (the March Intifada) by Iraqis opposed to Saddam's regime and as *Mu'amarat Al-Ghadr wa Al-Khiyana* (Conspiracy of Betrayal and Treason) by the Baghdad government and its propaganda machine.³³⁴ A composite picture of the forces which took part in the March Intifada and those who tried to exploit it to their political advantage, will also be provided. The objectives, social composition and political or religious orientation of the insurgents will also be taken up. Attention will also be focused on the role of regional and international powers especially that of Iran and Syria in supporting or manipulating some of the major Iraqi opposition groups. The chapter ends with an assessment of the role played by the first post-Gulf War opposition umbrella organisation *Lajnat Al-Amal Al-Mushtarak* (Joint Action Committee) which, for a variety of reasons, was born dysfunctional.

³³⁴The word 'intifada' did not become part of the English political jargon until the late eighties when European and U.S. journalists started giving wide coverage to the Palestinians' uprising in the Israeli occupied West Bank. In Iraqi politics, the word 'intifada' normally refers to the November 1952 Uprising during the royal regime. See Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 666ff.

Prelude to Crisis: Iraq From August 1988 to August 1990

Despite the all-out war which raged between Iraq and Iran for eight years from September 1980 to August 1988, Saddam Hussein's regime managed to come out of the conflagration practically unscathed, if not even stronger than he had been, both militarily and in matters related to the internal security of the regime. No serious challenge was in fact posed either by the external enemy or indeed by the traditional opposition groups supported and financed by either Syria or Iran. Except for a few, operations, the Iraqi opposition working on Iraqi soil was unable to make their presence widely felt, let alone shake the Baghdad government or topple it.

Throughout the Iraq-Iran war period, due to the regime's ruthless measures, opposition activities inside Iraq practically came to a halt as all dissidents or those suspected of having links with them were physically eliminated, except of course those who managed to flee the country to escape certain execution or "disappearance".³³⁵ On the economic and financial fronts, the eight-year war however left Saddam Hussein's embattled regime totally bankrupt and heavily burdened with foreign debts from "brotherly" and "friendly" countries. The fall in the price of oil meted out a severe blow to the crumbling Iraqi economy.

The two years which separate the First and Second Gulf Wars (1988-1990) marked a decisive period in the history of contemporary Iraq. This short span shaped or rather etched even deeper the political characteristics of the Iraqi leadership and led to the dangerous path which the regime felt compelled to take. It is now

commonplace to say that Iraq neither lost the war against Iran nor won. it. The only "victory" which Saddam Hussein was perhaps entitled to claim was the fact that Iran, with its vast resources and manpower, did not, or could not, win the war against him. However, the most significant outcome of the military confrontation was the moulding or the shaping of a regime which came increasingly to contain a complex mass of inherent contradictions: immense military might, at least by regional standards, and a political leadership of wide ambitions both locally and regionally but fettered by empty coffers and a broken economy. The regime's trumpeting of imaginary victories and heroism against the "centuries old" enemy, "the infidel Persians" may be said to have backfired in that the regime became a captive of its own vaunting self-aggrandizement. Despite the fevered attempts of the propagandists to boost the morale of the masses, the Iraqis were looking forward to a respite from the agonies and tragedies brought about by the oppressive regime which had sent their children to the front and confiscated their civil liberties and human rights, all in the name of "unity", "freedom" and "socialism".³³⁶ Throughout these two years the Iraqis felt quite betrayed as no improvement whatsoever was felt either in the economic domain or in the field of human rights:

As the immediate pressures ceased, the population looked forward to its "peace dividend" -- a secure peace with Iran, a return to Iraq's pre-war prosperity and "more democracy" by which was meant a loosening of the regime's severe war-time repression. But there was no peace with Iran, only a cease-fire.... There was no prosperity after the cease-fire.... Nor was there any

³³⁵In Saddam Hussein's Iraq, "disappearance" is a euphemism for death or murder. For a list of high-ranking officers, Ba'thist old guard and politicians of ministerial rank or above purged by the regime from its seizure of power in 1968 through to the second year of the Iraq-Iran war, see Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, pp. 292-296.

³³⁶Seeking to echo the slogans of the French Revolution, Sorbonne educated Michael Aflaq, founder of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party coined the Party's motto.

significant loosening of the regime's war-time repression.³³⁷

What complicated the situation even further was the fact that the end of the Iraq-Iran war coincided with the dramatic changes in East Europe, which were later crowned with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The fall of Nicolae Ceausescu, Erich Honecker and their ilk inspired terror in the heart of the Iraqi dictator who was suddenly heard making references, albeit few and far between, to democracy, a new constitution, transparency in government, pluralism and social prosperity. He even issued an all-embracing amnesty for dissidents and opposition groups living in exile.³³⁸ These protestations however did nothing to alleviate the fear and suspicion Iraqi dissidents then as now felt towards him. The regime was once again snubbed when its call fell on deaf ears.³³⁹ The complications and repercussions on the economic front furthermore frustrated the high hopes of Iraqis who were trying to build their shattered economy.³⁴⁰ These developments pushed the beleaguered leader to revert to the age-old ploy of creating a crisis and diverting attention to a 'foreign' enemy. This time however the 'foreign' enemy was the tiny fellow-Arab country, Kuwait.

To Saddam Hussein, oil rich Kuwait represented an easy way out of his predicament and was furthermore the elixir which would heal all that his economic and political policies had undone. He thought that if he invaded Kuwait and annexed it, he would be able first to cancel the huge debts owed to Kuwait itself, intimidate other creditor Gulf states into abandoning their demand for payment, as well as using the booty to

³³⁷Laurie Mylroie, *The Future of Iraq* (Washington, D. C. : The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1991), p. 29.

³³⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

³³⁹Geoff Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam* (London: MacMillan, 1996), pp. 333ff.

pay other foreign debts.³⁴¹ Furthermore, Iraq's sense of relative deprivation, as Nazih Ayubi points out, was particularly exacerbated by the presence of less advanced but much richer neighbours and its anger at what it considered "lack of understanding and cooperation on the part of those on whose behalf it had fought for eight years".³⁴² But, as Jill Crystal points out, there were other reasons for Saddam Hussein's decision to invade his southern neighbour, internal to Iraq, that had little to do with Kuwait:

These include not only Iraq's dire economic circumstances, but Saddam Hussein's concern with the potential economic and political demands of a large, restless and still mobilized army, and a general population that had suffered through a long, hard war with Iran with virtually nothing to show for its years of sacrifice.³⁴³

The Invasion of Kuwait and its Impact on Iraqi Opposition

The impact on the Iraqi opposition of Saddam's invasion and annexation of Kuwait was overwhelming. It turned most of the rank and file of Iraqi troops into potential opposition men. Some of those "hundreds of thousands of angry soldiers, bitter at Saddam Hussein for starting a war they could not win,"³⁴⁴ who crossed the line into Iran or Saudi Arabia, came to join this Iraqi opposition group or that. Another development occurred which was to boost the morale of exile Iraqi opposition organisations. Political refugees, who had never attracted any real attention from

³⁴⁰ Simons, *Iraq from*, pp. 340-41.

³⁴¹ Wahib Sufi and Adnan Sufi, *Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and The Gulf Crisis: A Case Study of International Crisis Management* (Beirut: Dar Al-Saqi, 1993), p. 41.

³⁴² Nazih N. Ayubi, *Overstating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995), p. 337.

³⁴³ Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), updated edition, pp. 173-74.

their host countries, suddenly found themselves accorded an immense welcome. In short, developments were moving at a much faster rate than the Iraqi opposition, which had been moribund for years, could comfortably deal with.

The universal condemnation of the invasion provided the opposition groups with a golden opportunity to exploit to the full the world's outrage at Saddam Hussein's misadventure. At the time, most opposition groups living in exile felt that the invasion would definitely lead to the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime. This rather pervasive attitude was based not only on the intense international condemnation but also on what they called Iraq's fatigue. Opposition political support started coming from a variety of sources. It became apparent however that the opposition groups felt that the Iraqi masses, who were still licking their wounds from the Iraq-Iran War, were not prepared to enter into yet another bloody experience which could prove as protracted as the previous one. On top of this, the new enemy was not a third world power like Iran, but the only super power in the world, backed diplomatically by the whole world community and militarily by thirty nations and by many others financially and technically.

The invasion and subsequent annexation of Kuwait necessitated the redeployment of Saddam Hussein's forces to subjugate Kuwait. In this sense, it was generally perceived that the invasion weakened the regime's grip on internal affairs and encouraged foreign powers, both regional and international, to support and even adopt certain groups or individuals opposed to the Baghdad government in an attempt to use the opposition card to bring down his regime.

³⁴⁴Andrew Cockburn and Patrick Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein*

The Intifada

No sooner had the cease-fire agreement been announced than an armed opposition to Saddam Hussein's regime quickly spread throughout the Shi'a populated provinces. With the exception of a few pockets in the province of Basra, all southern and southwestern provinces rebelled against the central government: Kut, Babylon, Karbala', Najaf, Dhi-Qar, Maysan and Muthanna. In these areas and over a period of just a few days the central government's authority collapsed, bringing total chaos to these provinces.³⁴⁵

Most researchers who have taken up the March Intifada speak of it as a spontaneous response to the conditions prevailing at the time. On the other hand, there are those, admittedly few, who speak of advance planning and direct foreign intervention. Wafiq Al-Samarra'i, ex-Chief of Iraqi Military Intelligence who fled to the West in 1994, stresses that the popular uprising was in point of fact pre-meditated and had been organized well ahead of time. Among the reasons Al-Samarra'i cites to support his claim are the supposed mobilisation by Iran of armed units made up of Iraqi expatriots living in Iran and recruited by the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq all along the Iraq-Iran border in the central sector. He also cites the discovery of telecommunication networks inside Iraq as proof that the uprising received substantial operational foreign support.³⁴⁶

What is certain however is the participation of Iranian-trained Iraqi exiles in the uprising. Charles Tripp asserts that

(New York: Harper Collins, 1999), p. 14.

³⁴⁵Wafiq Samarrai, *Destroyer of Eastern Gateway*, pp. 413ff.

³⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 413-14.

Baqir Al-Hakim, head of SCIRI sent a few thousand of his organisation's Badr Brigade across the border to help the rebels, whose numbers were swollen by army deserters fleeing the military disaster in the south.³⁴⁷

Documents seized by the Iraqi regime at the height of the Intifada clearly implicate the Islamic Republic in the uprising against the regime of Saddam Hussein. In one such document a military order was issued, commanding all local recruits and those who have crossed the border from Iran to be accountable only to the representative of Ayatullah Baqir Hakim.³⁴⁸ Discussing the "Iranian role" in the Intifada, Amir Taheri points out that Tehran 'sent large quantities of food and medical supplies' in an attempt to win over the Shi'a population of southern Iraq. He further notes that it was "perfectly possible that the convoys were also used for shipping arms to Shi'as and Kurdish forces inside Iraq".³⁴⁹ Others speak of "solid evidence of Iranian support for the insurrection in Shi'a-dominated southern Iraq".³⁵⁰

On the other hand, scholars sympathetic with the Shi'a cause in Iraq scoff at the "myth of Iranian intervention", emphasising that the uprising was a natural expression of the suppressed emotions of anger, disappointment, bitterness and revenge at the political and religious persecution from which they had been suffering for the last three decades.³⁵¹ While there is no hard evidence of direct involvement by Iran or Iranian-supported elements in the Intifada, there is of course, as Taheri points out, "every reason to believe that such involvement could have taken place

³⁴⁷ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 256.

³⁴⁸ Adel Raouf, *Al-Asmal Al-Islami Fi Al-Iraq: Qiraa Naqdiya Li-Masirat Nisf Qarn 1950-2000* (Islamic Action in Iraq: A Critical Reading of Developments Over Half a Century 1950-2000) (Damascus: Al-Markaz Al-Iraqi Lil-Dirasat Wa Al-Ilam, 2000), pp. 444-45.

³⁴⁹ Amir Taheri, 'Iran reveals its hand as ayatollah's army moves on Iraqi towns' *The Daily Telegraph*, 5th March, 1991.

³⁵⁰ Joseph Fitchett, 'Mounting Iraqi Unrest: Evidence of Iran's Role,' *International Herald Tribune*, 6th March 1991.

³⁵¹ Al-Hakim, *Dictatorship and Al-Intifada*, p. 25ff.

out, "every reason to believe that such involvement could have taken place and that some 10, 000 armed men could have crossed Iran's frontier into Iraq".³⁵²

Causes of the Intifada

The reasons behind the eruption of the Intifada immediately after the Gulf War was over, are not difficult to discern. The shameful military defeat undermined, albeit temporarily, the regime's grip on power, exposed its weaknesses and shamed even further the political leadership which had been living an enormous lie. The sudden disruption of vital services, the disappearance of all vestiges of authority from cities and towns, and the preoccupation of the armed forces and security apparatus with the external adversaries encouraged large sections of Iraqi society to seize what they considered an opportune moment to oust the ruthless regime which, in 1988 had thought nothing of gassing its own people.³⁵³

On the other hand, when the aerial bombardment of Iraqi positions in Kuwait and Iraq started, morale among the Iraqi armed forces was, for a variety of reasons, at its lowest as the military, who lacked faith in Saddam Hussein's cause, felt they were fighting a losing battle. In point of fact, even

Saddam himself implied in certain postwar discussions with his officers that he was aware that some of them felt that the Iraqi army was forced to fight a formidable enemy against which they had no chance. In one awards ceremony, he tried to convince his officers: "We knew that the enemy would use against us sophisticated weapons... we prepared for it and studied these weapons like the Apache ".... Saddam was evidently worried about his officers' loyalty, and in one meeting he jokingly suggested that they would stage a coup d'etat against himself so as

³⁵²'Iran reveals its hand,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 5th March 1991.

³⁵³Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. xvi.

"not to disappoint the West".³⁵⁴

The situation of the soldiers was deplorable. While Saddam Hussein continually resorted to the age-old policy of *targhib* (enticement) and *tarhib* (terror) when dealing with the officer corps as with other high officials in the regime, he had nothing to offer the 1.5 million strong army³⁵⁵ but *tarhib*. During the run up to the Gulf War, the soldiers, made up largely of conscripts, were ill-fed and exhausted. Despite ruthless punishments which extended to their families, desertion was the order of the day. In point of fact, desertion rates were so staggeringly high that only few units in the army "can boast 65 percent to 70 percent of their authorized manpower".³⁵⁶ As soon as Desert Storm started, thousands of old and new recruits fled the battle zones with their weapons and munitions which they took to their homes or hideouts.³⁵⁷ It is to be remembered that before the military operations of Desert Storm started, an immense psychological campaign had been launched to undermine the already low morale of the Iraqi armed forces stationed in Kuwait and in the south and south-west of Iraq. General Khalid Bin Sultan refers to a vast 'psyops' operation in which among other things, millions of leaflets were dropped over Iraqi lines:

Among the most effective was one designed as a 'pass' promising the holder a warm welcome in the Kingdom [of Saudi Arabia].... Waving this pass, thousands of Iraqi troops crossed our line to surrender.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁴Baram, *Towards Crisis*, p. 46.

³⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 46.

³⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 48.

³⁵⁷Al-Hakim, *Dictatorship*, pp. 27-28.

³⁵⁸HRH General Khaled Bin Sultan, *Desert Warrior: A Personal View of the Gulf War* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), pp. 299-300.

Besides the psychological factor and economic suffering of the rank and file, there was also the political climate in the region and, indeed, throughout the world as a whole, which was quite conducive to rebellion. Upon Saddam's defeat, calls for toppling his regime came from almost every quarter.³⁵⁹ In one of his statements on the necessity to evict Saddam Hussein from the Iraqi political scene, U. S. President George Bush said:

There is another way for the bloodshed to stop, and that is for the Iraqi military and Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside.³⁶⁰

Regardless of the reasons and actual motives behind them, these calls incited the Iraqis and sent them what looked like a clear message to rebel against the pariah regime, which had brought untold miseries to them:

In late February 1991, the coalition allies began suggesting that the Iraqi people should rise up and overthrow Saddam Hussein and his tyrannical regime. The peace would be easier on Iraq, declared Western politicians, if Saddam were to go. On 28 February 1991, soon after the cessation of military action, [British] Prime Minister John Major told the House of Commons that Iraq would remain an 'international pariah' while Saddam Hussein remained in power. In the same spirit a spokesman for the Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, continued to demand the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, urging Iraqi commanders to demonstrate 'courage, desire and ability' to bring him down'.³⁶¹

But such a task was virtually impossible to carry out. The armed forces, the paramilitary People's Army, the Police as well as the carefully selected Intelligence

³⁵⁹One such call came from the President of Iran who did not mince his words when, in a public speech, he addressed the Iraqi leader urging him "not to stain further his bloodied hands by killing more innocent Iraqis. Yield to the people's will and resign". See Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 34.

³⁶⁰ President George Bush, Speech to the Employees of the Raytheon Missile Systems Plant in Andover, Mass., on 15th February 1991. See www.csd.tamu.edu/bushlib/papers/1991/91021504.html.

officers had been completely infiltrated by handpicked officers and agents, mainly from Saddam Hussein's hometown, Tikrit who were directly linked to Saddam Hussein. All attempts aimed at staging a coup in the past had failed because of the horrible fate of plotters and assassins and the pervasiveness of Saddam's agents.³⁶²

The Spread of the Intifada

The immediate impact of the humiliating defeat of Iraq's forces and their tragic disorderly retreat from Kuwait was soon to be felt across most of Iraq. The first popular reaction to the military defeat that was soon to snowball into a frenzied insurgency against the regime of Saddam Hussein was recorded in Basra, the largest and predominantly Shi'a city in southern Iraq.³⁶³ Basra is adjacent to Kuwait which is, according to Saddam's propaganda machine, a "branch" of the Iraqi or more specifically, the "Basra tree".

The first spark of the Intifada

seems to have started around the time that the formal cease-fire in the Gulf War came into effect at 5:00 A. M. on February 28 1991. A column of tanks fleeing from Kuwait rolled into Sa'd Square, a huge rectangular open space in downtown Basra. The commander at the head of the column positioned his vehicle in front of a gigantic mural of Saddam in military uniform located next to the Ba'th Party Headquarters Building in the Square. Standing on the chassis of his vehicle and addressing the portrait, he denounced the dictator in a blistering speech.... A crowd assembled. The atmosphere became highly charged. The commander jumped back into his tank and swiveled the gun turret to take aim at the portrait. He blasted away with several shells. A delirious crowd cheered

³⁶¹ Simons, *From Sumer to Saddam*, p. 32.

³⁶² Interview with Wafiq Al-Samarraei in London on 5th April 1999.

³⁶³ Ibrahim Nawwar, *Al-Mu'aradha Al-Iraqiya wal Sira' Li-Isqat Saddam (Iraqi Opposition and the Struggle to Topple Saddam)* (London: N Publications, 1992), p. 71; *Al-Diktatoriya wal Intifada (Dictatorship and the Intifada: A Documentary Analysis of the Popular Uprising of March 1991 in Iraq)* (London: Al-Rai'd Publications and Distribution, 1998), p. 29.

him, chanting, 'Saddam is finished. All the army is dead'.³⁶⁴

Soon after the arrival of the retreating and demoralized troops in Basra, the situation in that city suddenly exploded. From downtown Basra, the uprising soon spread northward to the adjacent provinces. Nasiriya and Amara were soon to catch fire. In the city of Nasiriya situated on the Euphrates in southern Iraq, a few miles from the ancient ruins of Biblical Ur, the four police stations strategically located throughout the city were attacked. There were similar incidents in other areas. The mostly Shi'a rebels chose their targets carefully. These stations were not only ugly monuments of repression but were also accessible buildings where large quantities of weapons were stacked.³⁶⁵

Armed with the weapons seized from the police stations, the rebels then moved to other targets which they overran with relative ease. Akram Al-Hakim, the Shi'a Islamist and President of Iraqi Human Rights Watch, points out that in Nasiriya as in other cities, as soon as the rebels were in control, they immediately set up what they called "field courts" which, as their name might suggest, dispensed fast-track revolutionary justice, seeking to avenge the injustices of the past.³⁶⁶

For lack of independent or objective sources and witnesses, it is still difficult to assess the claims and counter claims made by the opposition groups on the one hand, and the Baghdad government, on the other, about the wide-spread looting, shooting

³⁶⁴Kanan Makiya, *Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising And the Arab World* (London: Penguin, 1993), p 59; See also: Majid Al-Majid, *Intifadat Al-Sha'b Al-Iraqi: A. D. 1991/A. H. 1412* (Beirut: Dar Al-Wifaq, 1991), p. 22; Akram Al-Hakim, *Dictatorship*, p. 17. It is ironic that Hussein Al-Samarra'i, the military man who sparked off the Shi'a' rebellion against Saddam Hussein was himself a Sunni. See Ibrahim Nawwar, *Iraqi Opposition and the Struggle to Topple Saddam* (London: N Publications, 1993), p. 71.

³⁶⁵Al-Hakim, *Dictatorship*, p. 30.

of perceived suspects without proper trial, burning of government records and documents, destruction of civil centres and release of non-political prisoners. All these acts were committed during the March Intifada. While Saddam Hussein's regime blames the excesses on the opposition, the opposition groups emphasise that government agents had penetrated their ranks and embarked on these atrocities in order to undermine credibility of the opposition.³⁶⁷

Karbala and Najaf Rise in Arms

Accounts of the rebellion in the Shi'a holy cities differ on details but all agree that the revolt of Karbala started at the end of a funeral procession of one of the Gulf War victims. As the mourners left the mosque, shouts of *La Ilaha Illa Alla, Saddam Adduwwu Allah* (No God but Allah, Saddam is the enemy of God) were heard in the courtyard of the shrine of Al-Abbas, son of Prophet Muhammad's cousin Ali. When the mourners descended upon the deceased's house to offer their condolences they discovered that the police and security men had been keeping a close watch on them. In this tense situation, the police opened fire, which was returned. The confrontation resulted in the death of 15 men.³⁶⁸ That was more than enough to kindle the revolt. The angry mourners were soon joined by a throng of armed men who immediately headed towards the Traffic Police Headquarters, then Customs and Patrol Police stations which fell into rebel hands after some resistance. All this took place on 2nd March. After that the rebels pushed towards the Governorate, which they overran,

³⁶⁶*Ibid*, p. 33.

³⁶⁷Al-Majid, *Uprising and the Iraqi People*, pp. 40ff.

³⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 25.

capturing large quantities of weapons and ammunition.³⁶⁹

A similar story occurred in Najaf when young men, fifteen to twenty-four years old, came running out of the alleyways and back streets in groups:

About a hundred persons at most in each group, all carrying clubs and qamat (swords). Two or three had pistols.... They were shouting *Ya Saddam sheel iydak; Sha'b Al-Najaf ma yridak* (Saddam remove your hands, the people of Najaf don't want you). Also they were shouting *Maku Wali Illa Ali, Inreed Hakim Ja'fari* (No ruler but Ali, We want a Ja'fari [Shi'a] ruler).³⁷⁰

The demonstrators then started towards the *sahan* "courtyard" of the holy shrine. When the security men saw the armed throngs approaching, they fled but not without some resistance which resulted in the death of a number of young men. Upon securing the holy shrines, the rebels then turned to the police stations and, having overpowered the guards, captured the commander of the security police who was executed on the spot for refusing to cooperate. From there the rebels then headed towards the army units on the outskirts of Najaf. As with the policemen, the soldiers took to their heels without putting up much of a fight.³⁷¹ Estimates as to the numbers of people killed during the Najaf Intifada vary considerably. Rebel sources according to Kanan Makiya put the number of Ba'thists killed at over four hundred during the first day.³⁷²

In short, between the 2nd and 15th March 1991, the Intifada had spread from the southernmost tip of Iraq in Basra to cover most of the mid-Euphrates and north

³⁶⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 28-9.

³⁷⁰Makiya, *Cruelty and Silence*, p. 66.

³⁷¹*Ibid.*, pp. 68-9.

³⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 69.

provinces. Even in the Sunni strongholds, such as in parts of the Anbar and Mosul areas, where resentment against Saddam Hussein's regime was not as prevalent as it was in the predominantly Shi'a' areas, many of the Ba'th leaders were targeted. Fearing that the Intifada might engulf the capital, Saddam Hussein imposed a midnight to dawn curfew in Baghdad. Security measures were tightened even further when all exits and approaches to the city were sealed and carefully monitored. Despite these measures armed demonstrators took to the streets of the predominantly Shi'a part of Baghdad known as Saddam City as well as in other parts of the capital.³⁷³

The Intifada Assessed

That the March Intifada was started by elements within the Iraqi armed forces is quite significant. It clearly shows that one of the staunchest parts of the apparatus which Saddam Hussein had been using to impose his dictatorial rule was becoming responsive to the popular sentiments which called for political change. Another point to be remembered about the Intifada was the fact that it broke the great psychological barrier which had, for a long time, practically paralysed all attempts to effect political change in Iraq. The destruction of Saddam Hussein's mural at Sa'ad Square in Basra was in a way a symbolic event which encapsulated the fall of the idol so fiercely feared and detested by the Iraqis. For security reasons, all the military officers who joined the Intifada, did so in their personal capacity, not as uniformed soldiers in the armed forces. Some officers who were sent to crush the Intifada could not bring themselves to fire against the rebelling masses, gave themselves up and surrendered

³⁷³A detailed "diary" of the Uprising is given in Nawwar, *The Uprising*, pp.89ff.

to whoever happened to be in command at the time. Others helped the Intifada by secretly providing the rebels with arms and munitions smuggled out of their units.³⁷⁴

The military who took part in the Intifada came from practically all units within the armed forces, except the Republican Guards. The officers in this corps were "handpicked Sunnis who came mainly from Mosul, Tikrit or Ramadi and whose loyalty and that of their families had been proved long before they were admitted to this elite force".³⁷⁵ In resorting to excessive and ruthless methods against the Intifada rebels, "most officers in that corps, felt they were fighting a sectarian war against the Shi'as".³⁷⁶

The dramatic turn of events failed to ensure success of the uprising, both at the military and popular level. Many Iraqis who had welcomed it at first felt unsure about what the unknown future might hold for them at the hands of what they considered a leaderless rabble. Some feared that the alternative would be even worse than the repugnant regime of Saddam Hussein.

Among the chief factors which led to its failure was the fact that the Uprising targeted the periphery and ignored the centre, Baghdad, the seat of government and hub of all political and economic activities. Lack of any clear strategy on the part of the rebels provided Saddam Hussein with ample opportunity to think out counter measures, regroup and launch a viciously savage counter attack. The opposition parties which, on the eve of Desert Storm, had agreed to organize their activities and

³⁷⁴ Interview with Wafiq Al-Samarraei on 5th April 1999.

³⁷⁵ Irfan Al-Fahad, Qahtan Al-Dulaimi and Basha'ir Al-Dulaimi, "Awamil Ihbat Al-Intifada: Dirasa Istitla'iya", *Dirasat Iraqiya* (Reasons Behind Failure of the Intifada: An Exploratory Study), *Iraqi Studies*, Vol. 2, 1997, p. 145.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.147.

adopt a political agenda through which they promised to enhance co-operation and efforts to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein abandoned the said agreement as soon as the situation in Iraq flared up.³⁷⁷

With the possible exception of the Tehran-based Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), which deployed its recruits to the mid-Euphrates region to organise the masses and lead them, all other Opposition groups adopted a wait-and-see attitude. The sudden popular surge against the Baghdad regime had taken them by surprise. Many of these groups hoped that they alone would monopolise the political arena and glean the fruits of the Uprising, without sharing them with their fellow opposition parties. It is ironic that the Uprising which should have unified all forces endeavouring to unseat Saddam Hussein should itself divide them and sow even more seeds of suspicion and recrimination among them.

Another factor which alarmed the rebelling masses and raised new fears amongst them was the fact that the pro-Iranian anti-Saddam forces had jumped the gun and behaved irresponsibly. The supporting forces which crossed the borders from Iran came waving Iranian flags and carrying pictures of Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution Chairman, Muhammad Baqir Al-Hakim, while others were wearing a red band round the head, the emblem of the Revolutionary Guard in Iran. This move, argues Ibrahim Nawwar, would have been understood had it come as a preparation for the establishment of a new regime and then only after that of Saddam Hussein had been toppled.³⁷⁸

During the heat of the Intifada, physical elimination was a widely used tactic

³⁷⁷Nawwar, *Iraqi Opposition*, p. 75.

throughout the provinces of the South. It seemed as though the rebels had nothing in their minds but vengeance and retaliation for crimes committed by the regime. The Uprising's 'revolutionary legitimacy' became dependent on the ability to eliminate indiscriminately and without trials. In the North, the situation was quite different. The Kurds, admittedly far more experienced than their southern fellow countrymen, adopted an ancient tactic whereby new alliances were formed between them and the troops deployed by Saddam Hussein in their area. In so doing they managed to win over thousands of the "Fursan (knights) corps" the Baghdad-officered Kurdish militia.³⁷⁹

The total absence of any leadership or coordination among the rebelling provinces was a yet more damaging shortcoming. Inexperienced young men who had no military training took charge of a great task which even professional soldiers would have found difficult. Apart from the non-existent leadership, there were many logistical difficulties which the enthusiastic young men of the south had to grapple with. Desert Storm had destroyed the infrastructure of practically all telecommunication in Iraq. Even more damaging, the rebels who managed to take over in many provinces had no awareness of counter-intelligence or precautionary measures. Security was often breached and the rebels were easily infiltrated by supporters of the Saddam regime who bowed before the tornado of popular anger, only to pounce at the rebels at the first available opportunity. Elements from the Ba'th Party and General Intelligence often spread rumours which proved even more destructive to the cause of the rebels than canon-fire. Infiltrators also provided

³⁷⁸Ibrahim Nawwar, *Iraqi Opposition*, p. 75.

³⁷⁹Interview with Wafiq Al-Samarraei in London on 5th April 1999.

speedy and regular reports on the movements and plans of the rebels, which made the task of Saddam Hussein's forces much easier. The rumour which was spread among the rebels to the effect that the Iranians were on their way to offer succour had a devastating effect. When the hours and days passed with no such succour ever arriving, frustration, panic and bitterness seized the rebels some of whom were driven to despair.

Scarcity of food and fuel was at its worst when the Intifada broke out, coming as it did on the heels of the Gulf War which had devastated most of the oil refineries in the country. The situation became even worse when, among other brutal measures, the forces of Saddam Hussein imposed a blockade on all rebelling towns and cities cutting off electricity and water supplies. The ensuing tragic situation pushed thousands to flee their homes and lands to other areas. All these measures were taken against untrained civilians, deserters and ex-army conscripts who only fought with rifles and other light weapons against modern tanks, heavy artillery and surface to surface missiles.

Sectarian transgressions were among the serious mistakes made by the Intifada. It is reported that during the turbulent weeks of March 1991, Sunni Muslims were forbidden from performing their daily prayers in their mosques unless they adopted the Shi'a form of *azan* (prayer call). This obviously alarmed large segments of the community who would otherwise have sided with the rebels. According to Iraq's ex-Head of Military Intelligence who defected to the West in 1994, the sectarian orientation of the Shi'a rebels manifested itself amply in the slaughter of numerous Sunni officers for no reason other than their denominational origin. These crimes were exploited to the full by the Saddam regime, which was struggling for survival

against what many had considered at the time an unstoppable popular revolution. The excesses were soon portrayed as an Iranian intervention and a Shi'a plot aimed at undermining the Sunni establishment. The use of the sectarian card proved quite effective and the military, which was officered mainly by Sunnis, rallied behind staunch Sunni Saddam Hussein in his hour of need. Assisted by a great Western conspiracy of silence, inspired by fears that a Khomeini-type revolutionary regime might replace that of Saddam Hussein, the army succeeded in quelling the Uprising in a matter of days.³⁸⁰

More importantly, the parties, which supposedly led the Intifada or at least participated in it did not have a political framework that encompassed the whole Iraqi political spectrum. The parties in the North represented only the Kurds whereas the parties which were directly involved in the South and mid-Euphrates regions were universally Shi'a. Instead of joining forces, or at least coordinating operations, the Shi'a fought their own war unassisted by fellow citizens fighting the same enemy.³⁸¹

Contradiction between the slogans put forward by leaders of the Intifada and what was actually practised was yet another factor which undermined credibility of the rebels and contributed to their rather abrupt fall. While they called for the formation of a provisional government to be entrusted with the task of ensuring the smooth transfer of power to democratically elected representatives, the Shi'a Islamists were forcing their own agenda on the people. The call for the establishment of law and order in which individuals were assured of fair trials was soon replaced by arbitrary

³⁸⁰Interview with Wafiq Al-Samarraei on 5th April 1999.

³⁸¹Interview with General Wafiq Al-Samarri on 15th January 1999.

sentences and on-the-spot executions.³⁸²

The Intifada and the Outside World

Lack of any regional or international support may be cited as another reason for the collapse of the uprising. Far from being altruistic, the attitude of neighbouring countries was dictated by their national interests and strategies. Except for Jordan, most, if not all, neighbouring countries stressed that while Saddam Hussein remained in power, stability and peace in the Middle East would always be under threat. The mass media in these countries joined their Western counterparts in smearing even further the character of Saddam Hussein and voicing support for the oppressed masses of Iraq. During the height of the Intifada, when toppling the Iraqi dictator became a real possibility, these countries suddenly changed their strategy, declaring that they would not interfere in the internal affairs of Iraq. It is widely accepted now that the regional powers preferred to deal with 'the devil they knew' rather than adopt and support an unknown leadership which might one day threaten their interests and stability as Saddam Hussein had repeatedly done. To extricate themselves from a possible political predicament, the oft-repeated clichés of preserving Iraqi territorial integrity and rejecting foreign intervention were often used as a pretext to dissociate themselves from the rebels and the opposition forces in general.

On the international scene, interest in the Intifada, which had generated considerable sympathy,³⁸³ soon subsided. The United States, which had earlier on called on the Iraqis to topple Saddam Hussein, did practically nothing to help the rebels. In point

³⁸² *Ibid.*

³⁸³ Harvey Morris, "Iraq's rebels deserve help," *The Independent*, March 12th, 1991; 'Damascus and Riyadh vie to promote their exile proteges,' *The Guardian*, 28th February 1991.

of fact many high ranking U.S. officials declared that their primary aim of evicting Saddam Hussein had been achieved and that they were not interested in marching on to Baghdad or in toppling the Iraqi dictator. President George Bush for one "appears to have retreated from his wartime call to the Iraqi people to overthrow their leader".³⁸⁴ General Colin Powell, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, among others, demonstrated the typical attitude of the West when he pointed out that "better the Saddam Hussein we know than an unknown weak coalition, or a new strong man who is an unknown quantity".³⁸⁵

The prospect of a Shi'a crescent extending from Iran across Iraq and ending with southern Lebanon never ceased to alarm Western and Israeli strategists and indeed some regional powers as well. In *Tyranny's Ally*, David Wurmser refers to the sudden shift in U.S. attitude towards the Intifada and points out that the United States was, for a number of reasons, more interested in a military coup than a popular uprising and that Washington was attempting 'to get rid of Saddam Hussein, not his regime'.³⁸⁶ George Bush's attitude towards the regime in Baghdad had an immense impact on the popular feelings of the Iraqis who had hoped the U.S. administration would come to their rescue, believing Bush's repeated statement that he had no argument with the Iraqi people. The sudden shift in U.S. policy pushed most Iraqis to see Bush in a new light. To them Bush's words were as credible as those of "a fox who says he sympathises with the chickens he is about to devour".³⁸⁷

³⁸⁴"Bush shuns rebels to avert a Shi'a regime in Baghdad," *The Independent*, 9th March, 1991.

³⁸⁵"Britain and U.S. part over Iraqi rebels," *The Guardian*, March 13th 1991.

³⁸⁶David Wurmser, *Tyranny's Ally: America's failure to Defeat Saddam Hussein* (Washington: AEI Press, 1999), p. 11.

³⁸⁷"Can the Allies Be Trusted?", *New Horizon*, No. 382, June 1991, p. 2.

Birth of the Joint Action Committee (JAC)

The invasion of Kuwait provided the highly disparate and squabbling Iraqi opposition groups with a favourable international atmosphere in which diplomatic, financial and political support was offered. Encouraged by the prospect of the imminent fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, the two countries which had been hosting most of the Iraqi opposition groupings, Syria and Iran, pushed these groupings to hold a general conference to be devoted to the coordination of efforts, with a view to forming a united front. Differences between rival groups were temporarily patched up after much deliberation over a period lasting five months between the major opposition groups. The meetings resulted in the publication of a joint communiqué, which was signed by representatives of the major Islamic, Arab nationalist, Kurdish and democratic opposition groups. The Communiqué, which heralded the birth of a new umbrella organisation, was announced on 27th December 1990, when it looked as though Saddam Hussein's days were numbered.

Among other things, the communiqué called for:

1. Toppling the dictatorial rule and repealing all inhuman and unjust legislations forced upon the Iraqis by the regime
2. Forming a coalition government made up of all political groupings which oppose the Saddam Hussein regime.

It is significant that the overture of the communiqué was dedicated to the condemnation of Iraq for starting the Iraq-Iran which had ended with a UN brokered cease-fire agreement in August 1988. This obviously indicates the immense influence Iran had over the conference.

Prior to the Damascus Communiqué, Iraqi opposition groups had been deeply and openly divided and consumed by recriminations and accusations. In point of fact a whole month of meetings and consultations was spent on whether the communiqué to be adopted at the conclusion of the gathering should be headed with the Arabic *basmala* (In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate).³⁸⁸ Some opposition factions were at each other's throat. This was especially true in the Kurdish region where rival groups often tried to resolve their differences through violent means.³⁸⁹

As might be expected, ideological, tactical and strategic differences were deepened even further by the rivalry between Tehran and Damascus for influence in the post-Saddam era. What complicated the task of the opposition groups was the fact that within the same organisation, there was little or no coordination between those living in exile and those who were in Iraq. Furthermore, conditions inside Iraq were such that any cooperation or coordination between opposition groups was almost unthinkable for fear of infiltration and betrayal and also because most of these groups distrusted each other's intentions. To complicate matters even further, there were of course some opposition figures and even groupings who were, and perhaps still are, suspected of having strong links with one Western power or another. Against this background of mutual distrust and suspicion and amid much media fanfare, however, an important conference was held in the Syrian capital. The communiqué was signed by practically all those who had any political weight in the anti-Saddam camp. These

³⁸⁸Besides the differences in ideologies between the Islamists on the one hand and the nationalists, communists and non-religious groupings on the other, it was feared that such a preamble to the communiqué might give the impression that the Islamists were in control of the Opposition movement.

included 17 groups:

1. *Al-Majlis Al-A'la Lil-Thawra Al-Islamiya* (The Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution) (Muhammed Baqir Al-Hakim)
2. *Hizb Al-Da'wah* ('Islamic Call') (Al-Asifi)
3. *Munadhamat Al-Amal Al-Islami* (Islamic Action Organization) (Al-Muddaris)
4. *Hizb Al-Ba'th* (Renaissance Party) (Mahdi Alaiwi Al-Obeidi)
5. *Al-Tajamu' Al-Iraqi Al-Dimocrati* (Congress of Iraqi Democrats) (Salih Duggleh)
6. *Al-Kutla Al-Islamiya* (Islamic Bloc) (Muhammad Al-Al-Alousi)
7. *Harakat Al-Mujahideen Al-Iraqiyeen* (Iraqi Mujahideen Movement) (Bayan Jabur)
8. *Jama'at Al-Ulama' Al-Mujahideen Fil-Iraq* (Coalition of Mujahideen Clerics in Iraq) (Hasan Al-Nouri)
9. *Al-Hizb Al-Dimocrati Al-Kurdistani* (Kurdish Democratic Party) (Mas'oud Al-Barazani)
10. *Al-Ittihad Al-Watani Al-Kurdistani* (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) (Jalal Al-Talbani)
11. *Hizb Al-Sha'b Al-Dimocrati* (People's Democratic Party) (Sami Abdul-Rahman)

³⁸⁹Interview with Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq representative in London, Dr Hamid Al-Bayati on 15th March 1999. The communiqué was finally published with the *basmala* at the top of the document.

12. *Hizb Kadihi Kurdistan* (Kurdish Proletariat Party) (Abdul-Khaliq Zanganah)
13. *Al-Hizb Al-Ishtiraki Al-Kurdi* (Kurdish Socialist Party) (Rasoul Mamend)
14. *Al-Hizb Al-Shiyou'i Li Iqlim Kurdistan* (The Communist Party of the Kurdish Region)
15. *Al-Haraka Al-Dimoqratiya Al-Athouriya* (Assyrian Democratic Movement)
16. *Al-Hizb Al-Shiyou'i Al-Iraqi* (Iraqi Communist Party) (Kerim Ahmad)
17. *Al-Hay'a Al-Arabiya Al-Mustaqillah* (Independent Arab Group)³⁹⁰ :

1. General Hasan Al-Naqib
2. Mubdir Al-Wayyis- *Al-Hizb Al-Ishtirakiy Fil Iraq* (Socialist Party of Iraq)
3. Abdul-Ilah Al-Nasrawi- *Al-Haraka Al-Ishtirakkiya Al-Arabiya* (Arab Socialist Movement)

Of the above 17 groups, it was agreed that five major parties would be granted extra administrative powers and would be empowered to convene a national conference, accept or reject new members and engage in negotiations on behalf of all signatories of the JAC communiqué. These were:

1. *Al-Majlis Al-Ala Lil-Thawra Al-Islamiya* (Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution)

³⁹⁰The three signatories attended the conference as individuals and not as a political organisation.

2. *Hizb Al-Da'wah* (Islamic Call)
3. *Hizb Al-Ba'th Al-Arabi Al-Ishtiraki* (Arab Ba'th Socialist Party)
4. *Al-Hizb Al-Shiyoui Al-Iraqi* (The Communist Party)
5. *Al-Jabha Al-Kurdiya* (The Kurdish Front)

Long before the formation of the Joint Action Committee, Damascus and Tehran were intensely but discreetly trying to ensure full control over the opposition groups they were hosting. The fact that the Communiqué was signed in Damascus rather than Tehran had only symbolic significance in that it highlighted the Arab dimension of the struggle of the Iraqi people. The preparatory consultations and meetings which preceded the Damascus Communiqué were held in Damascus and Tehran alternately. However, because it was widely believed that Saddam Hussein would make his exit from the political equation as soon as the belligerency chapter was closed, Syria and Iran did all they could to provide their own political fronts that would fill the vacuum left by Saddam's departure. The groupings which had signed the Joint Action Committee Communiqué were perhaps even more optimistic about their future role than their patron states. To mobilise world public opinion which, thanks to Saddam's gassing of the Kurds in Halabcha and his invasion of Kuwait, was quite sympathetic if not enthusiastic about the opposition project, representatives of the Joint Action Committee toured Arab and foreign capitals and met senior officials there including some heads of state.³⁹¹

Despite the guidelines contained in the Communiqué which enjoined all signatories

³⁹¹Interview with Iraqi National Accord Assembly leader, Salah Omar Al-Ali on 1st March 1999.

to cooperate and support each other 'to achieve the noble aim of toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein', some parties tried to reap as much political and material gains as was possible even at the expense of their fellow signatories. To this end, some groups sent their own emissaries and organised a variety of activities without the knowledge or approval of the Committee. Although Syria and Iran were aware and in a way involved in it, the outside world was still not fully mindful of the deep divisions and differences between the various opposition groups. But the Western powers did perceive with some dismay the close association between the opposition groups and the two Middle Eastern players.

Soon after the second Gulf War, there was a growing awareness among Iraqi opposition circles that real international help would not be forthcoming until and unless opposition groups distanced themselves from Damascus and Tehran which were not among the most popular regimes in Western or indeed the conservative Arab states. The non-Islamist groups were the first to emphasise their independence from the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Islamists, on the other hand, attempted to project a moderate image of themselves to the outside world. This was especially true in Britain where it was often reiterated that the Iraqi Islamic movement posed no future danger to Western interests.³⁹²

The new circumstances required the opposition forces, which had suddenly found themselves involved in high level negotiations, to come in contact with a range of diversified political organisations, not only outside the structure of the Committee but also outside the traditional Damascus-Tehran axis. As more financial and moral

support was secured, a number of groups could now decrease their dependence on the regional powers, which continued for some time to enjoy maximum influence on the Committee. Other players however appeared on the field. Saudi Arabia cautiously but significantly engaged in dialogue with a number of political groupings which had turned to Riyadh for political and diplomatic support.

New Groups, Old Hands

No sooner had the Damascus-based Joint Action Committee been formed than a number of Iraqi groups and individual dissidents started to cast suspicion on the very foundation upon which the Committee was established. They charged the Committee of failing to represent all shades of the political spectrum of Iraqi politics and that it was trying to monopolise political action and exclude many who had played significant parts in the patriotic struggle against Saddam Hussein's regime. They also accused the Joint Action Committee of operating under the influence of the Damascus-Tehran axis.

These dissidents, who were mainly based in London, sought to take part in the organised opposition effort, but were careful not to fall into the same hole in which the older opposition groups had found themselves. Most of these dissidents preferred the Saudi gateway, as Saudi Arabia had no specific ambitions in Iraq and furthermore enjoyed a respectable Arab and international position.

Among the first grouping to claim a place in the Joint Action Committee was *Al-Majlis Al-Iraqi Al-Hurr* (Free Iraqi Council) which was officially launched on

³⁹²Interview with an ex-Islamic 'Da'wah' (Call) leader, Dr Muwaffaq Al-Rubai'in London on 17th May 1999.

February 10th 1991.³⁹³ The Council members were mainly drawn from middle class liberals, Western oriented and right-wing intellectuals headed by Sa'ad Salih Jabr, founder of the *Hizb Al-Umma Al-Jadid* (New Nation Party), which he dissolved as he sought to broaden his base and distance himself from any specific ideology.

A few days later, on 27th February 1991, the formation of another grouping was declared: *Al-Wifaq Al-Watani Al-Iraqi* (Iraqi National Accord). The founding members of *Al-Wifaq* were mainly ex-military officers and, old, mostly Sunni, Ba'thists disillusioned with the policies of Saddam Hussein. This group included Salah Omar Al-Ali, Salah Al-Shaikhli, Tahseen Mu'lla and others who had at one point or other held high positions in Saddam Hussein's regime. Like the Free Iraqi Council, this group also wanted to appeal to as wide a public as possible, hence they avoided use of the word 'party' in their newly formed movements.

The 5 +2 Formula

Representatives of these two new organisations moved to Damascus to meet the Joint Action Committee and discuss ways of joining forces in order to maximize pressure on the then highly fractured regime in Baghdad. The Joint Action Committee welcomed the two organisations as new additions to the original seventeen-member group. But the National Accord and the Free Council rejected the offer, which would have placed them as numbers 18 and 19. The *Wifaq* and the *Majlis Hurr* insisted that they were not political parties but representatives of broad political currents³⁹⁴. The Free Iraqi Council stressed that they were the true spokesmen of the Iraqi democrats

³⁹³ Interview with Mr Sa'ad Salih Jabr on 1st March 1999.

³⁹⁴ Interview with Salah Omar Al-Ali, Iraqi National Accord Assembly leader in London on 1st March 1999.

while the National Accord insisted that they represented the Arab nationalist movement. After a lengthy discussion, a new formula was reached, known as the 5+2 formula. Within the new formula the two newcomers were given a status comparable to the largest five³⁹⁵ organisations within the 17 groupings which had signed the Damascus Declaration. These had been in the political arena for decades and in their struggle against the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein or even against those who had ruled Iraq before him, had sustained many losses in human life.

Having agreed on this sensitive issue, the 19 political groupings within the framework of the new 5+2 formula then headed to Beirut to hold a national conference upon which high hopes hung. The gathering was widely covered by the international media which had not yet discovered that division was an inherent and tragic flaw of the Iraqi opposition.

The Beirut Conference

Two weeks after the end of Gulf War hostilities, hundreds of Iraqis converged on the Lebanese capital to meet for two days (13th – 14th March 1991) in order to 'devise ways of saving the Iraqis from dictatorship and safeguard the territorial integrity of the nation'. The conferees who came hurriedly from far and wide were soon to discover that these lofty aims were not easy to achieve. In fact, much to the dismay of the millions of silent Iraqi dissidents, even the task of holding a follow up conference to discuss ways and means of achieving those aims proved too difficult. The Beirut conference, which was attended by an impressive number of 450 Iraqi

³⁹⁵Apart from the question of proportion and the history of political struggle, the Joint Action Committee felt it was impractical to involve all 17 organisations in negotiations and dealings with the world.

personalities linked, with varying degrees, to the opposition movement had a major defect: there was no agreed agenda.

The newly created *Al-Wifaq Al-Watani* (National Accord), headed by Salah Omar Al-Ali and *Al-Majlis Al-Iraqi Al-Hurr* (Free Iraqi Council), headed by Sa'ad Salih Jabr also attended the Conference. A number of independent figures, religious leaders and Trade Unions representatives also attended. In addition to the impressive gathering of Iraqi exiles, representatives of the governments of Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Kuwait as well as envoys from a variety of Arab and Islamic liberation movements, mass media and human rights organisations were also present at the Conference.

As the conference did not have a specific agenda, it was decided that a number of Committees should be formed in order to oversee discussion of the various issues expected to be raised at the meetings. These Committees were made up of the parties attending the conference:

1. Foreign Relations Committee
2. Administrative Committee
3. Kurdish Question Follow Up Committee
4. Information Committee
5. Legal Committee
6. Military Committee
7. Political Committee
8. Financial Committee

Table 1: The Beirut Conference

The Islamic bloc	1. <i>Al-Majlis Al-A'la Lil-Thawra Al-Islamiya (Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution)</i> Headed by Muhammad Baqir Al-Hakim. The Supreme council is based in Tehran and has branches in London, Damascus and Beirut
	2.. <i>Al-Haraka Al-Islamiya fi Kurdistan Al-Iraq (Islamic Movement of Kurdistan)</i> Represented by Sheikh Ali Abdul-Aziz, Imam of the Halabcha Mosque.
	3. <i>Al-Tajammu' Al-Islami Al-Iraqi (Iraqi Islamic Grouping)</i> The most important Islamic figure in this organisation was Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun.
	4. <i>Hizb Al-Da'wah Al-Islamiya (Party of Islamic Call)</i> The most secretive of all opposition groups. Its spokesman was Muhammad Al-Asifi
	5. <i>Munadhamat Al-amal Al-Islami (Islamic Action Organisation).</i> Headed by Muhammad Taqi Muddarrissi
	6. <i>Harakat Al-Mujahideen Al-Iraqiyeen (Movement of Iraqi Mujahedeen)</i>
	7. <i>Harakat Jund Al-Imam (The Imam's Fighters Movement)</i> Headed by Sami Al-Badri
	8. <i>Jama'at Al-Ulama' Al-Mujahideen Fil Iraq (grouping of Mujahideen Scholars of Iraq)</i> Headed by Muhammad Baqir Al-Nasiri
	9. <i>Al-Ittihad Al-Islami Al-Al-Turkomani (Turkoman Islamic Union)</i>
	10. <i>A number of Islamic groupings not represented in the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq also attended the Beirut Conference. These included Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimoun (Muslim Brothers) and Hizb Al-Tahrir (Liberation Party). Unlike the Shi'a Islamic groupings referred to above, these two are exclusively Sunni.</i>
The Kurdish front	1. <i>Al-Hizb Al-Dimocrati Al-Kurdistani (Kurdish Democratic Party)</i> Headed by Mas'oud Barzani(represented by Izzi Al-Deen Barwari)
	2. <i>Al-Ittihad Al-Watani Al-Kurdistani (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan)</i> Headed by Jalal Al-Talbani
	3. <i>Hizb Al-sha'b Al-Kudustani (People's Party of Kurdistan)</i> Headed by Sami Abdul Rahman
	4. <i>Al-Hizb Al-Ishtiraki Al-Kurdistani (Socialist Party of Kurdistan)</i> Headed by Rasoul Mamend
The Arab Nationalist front	1. <i>Hizb Al-Bath Al-Arabi Al-Ishtiraki (Arab Ba'th Socialist Party)</i> Headed by Mahdi Al-Ubaidi
	2. <i>Independent Nationalists</i> Headed by General Hasan Al-Naqib
The Leftist & Socialist Front *	1. <i>Al-Hizb Al-Shiyou'i Al-Iraqi (Iraqi Communist Party)</i> Headed by Aziz Muhammad
	2. <i>Al-Tajammu' Al-Dimocrati Al-Iraqi(Iraqi Democratic Grouping)</i> Headed by Mubdir Al-Wayyis

- These parties often call themselves the Democratic Front

Having listened to the litany of crimes committed by the Saddam Hussein regime, the conference set out in general terms the steps needed to free the Iraqi people from the yoke of the repressive regime. These were contained in a final communiqué, which was signed by the delegates. The recommendations appealed to Arab and Islamic countries to recognise the Iraqi opposition as the legitimate representative of the Iraqis until they chose their own representatives in freely held elections. Other recommendations referred to the necessity of establishing coordination Committees to take charge of contacts with the outside world. Apart from the communiqué, no tangible results were achieved and the conferees spent most of their time and energy talking about the need to talk about the Iraqi crisis. To that end, it was also agreed that a conference be held in Riyadh within two months.

Iraqi Opposition and the 'Proportion War'

The dramatic developments inside Iraq in the aftermath of the March Intifada and the sudden turn of events in favour of Saddam Hussein's regime took the optimistic Joint Action Committee by surprise. No sooner had the delegates folded camp than the main Kurdish parties announced that they would negotiate with the Iraqi president in order to reach a peaceful settlement to the Kurdish question. Although the move was seen as stab in the back, there was not much the non-Kurdish opposition groups could do about it.

Despite the disappointments and failures of the Iraqi uprising, which came as a terrible blow to the opposition parties, attempts were made to reconvene a second conference in Riyadh. The two London-based groupings, the National Accord and the Free Iraqi Council, which apparently had wider ambitions and sought to create an alternative leadership for the Iraqi opposition, were particularly active in the period

immediately following the Beirut conference. The rifts and mutual suspicions which had become even deeper after the suppression of the Intifada, the internal bickering within each party and the mushrooming of splinter groups made the task of reconvening the expanded Joint Action Committee impossible. Among the other obstacles which stood in the way of convening the proposed Riyadh conference was what came to be known as the 'proportion war' in which each political grouping wanted to insure a high proportion of representation before it agreed to attend any national conference. The Islamic Shi'a bloc, which reiterated that it had a long history in opposing Saddam Hussein and that it had suffered more casualties at the hand of the regime sought to acquire a larger proportion of representation. In so doing they were trying to insure that they would play a significant part in post-Saddam Iraq.³⁹⁶

The First London Exploratory Conference

After a difficult period of shuttling between London, Tehran, Damascus and Riyadh, and arduous contacts made by the Free Iraqi Council and the National Accord group, on the one hand and many of the opposition groups which mushroomed in exile, especially in Britain on the other, it was agreed that an "exploratory" conference should be held in London on 5th July 1991. The aim of the conference was to discuss ways and means of coordinating opposition activities and also to implement the Beirut Conference recommendation regarding the holding of a general conference to be attended by representatives of all opposition groupings. Most of these groups were now trying to distance themselves from the Tehran-Damascus axis, which they felt

³⁹⁶ Interview with Dr Muwaffaq Al-Rubai'i in London on 5th March 1999.

had been dominating the activities of Iraqi opposition.³⁹⁷ The organisations which attended the exploratory conference included:

1. *Al-Wifaq Al-Watani Al-Iraqi* (Iraqi National Accord)
2. *Al-Majlis Al-Iraqi Al-Hurr* (Free Iraqi Council)
3. *Kawadir Hizb Al-Da'wah* (Islamic Call Cadres)³⁹⁸
4. Islamic Forces Grouping (*Jund Al-Imam*: Sa'ad Jawad)
5. National Committee for the Salvation of Iraq
6. The Faili Kurds Movement (Abdul Jalil Al-Faili)
7. Union of Iraqi Democrats (Farouq Ridha'a)
8. National Assyrian Grouping (Yatroun Darmu)
9. Free Officers Movement (Faris Al-Jadir)
10. Abdul Hussein Sha'ban (Independent)
11. Independent Kurds (Feriad Rashid)
12. Kurdish Movement in Kurdistan (Ihsan Abdul-Aziz)
13. *Al-Tajammu' Al-Democrati Al-Iraqi* (Iraqi Democratic Assembly represented by Salih Dugla)

The Exploratory Conference aimed at reactivating the opposition movement inside and outside Iraq and at involving as many opposition groupings as possible, a task which the Joint Action Committee had failed to achieve. The July gathering resulted in:

1. Forming a Contact Committee which was entrusted with the task of setting up an action plan, and a preparatory Committee for the purpose of convening an all

³⁹⁷Interview with Faris Al-Jadir, Free Officers Movement representative on 1st February 1999.

³⁹⁸This is a splinter group of Hizb Al-Da'wah (Islamic Call Party).

party conference within three months

2. Contacting the Joint Action Committee, as well as all European-based opposition groupings and urging them to cooperate and coordinate efforts.³⁹⁹

From its base in Damascus, the Joint Action Committee viewed the latest development with misgivings especially as it feared that those who took part in the London Exploratory Conference might supplant it and shift the focus of attention away from Syria. The Joint Action Committee received several letters from the newly formed Contact Committee in which the latter counselled speeding up the process of holding the much awaited national conference.⁴⁰⁰ But no response was ever received to the numerous requests. On 7th September 1991 the National Accord and Free Iraqi Council felt compelled to send a delegation to Damascus in order to set up a preparatory Committee which would take upon itself the task of convening the national conference.⁴⁰¹ In view of the increase in the number of Iraqi opposition “movements” and “fronts” and “unions”, it was agreed that new political grouping wishing to join the Joint Action Committee should be allowed to do so without any difficulty.

This resulted in the formation of the 7+7 formula which was entrusted with the preparation for the national conference. To the original seven (5+2) group, the following parties were added:

1. *Jabhat Al-Qiwa Al-Islamiya* (The Islamic Forces Front)
2. Union of Iraqi Democrats (Farouq Ridha'a)

³⁹⁹ Minutes of the first exploratory meeting held in London on 5th July 1991.

⁴⁰⁰ I have obtained copies of a number of such memoranda, the last of which was sent on 23rd September 1991.

⁴⁰¹ Interview with Sa'ad Salih Jabr on 1st March 1999.

3. Islamic Action Organisation (Ahmad Al-Katib)
4. Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun
5. Muhsin Daiza'ee

An extra representative from each of the following:

6. The Ba'th Party
7. The Communist Party⁴⁰²

It was further agreed that the 7+7 Committee should hold its first meeting in Damascus on 22nd September 1991 in order to prepare for the long awaited conference. But the meeting never took place as the Joint Action Committee felt that its position might be undermined, as relations between JAC and the Contact Committee developed into an undeclared but severe and highly suspicious rivalry. The Joint Action Committee then instructed its representatives⁴⁰³ in London to resort to delaying tactics in their dealings with the London based opposition groups. The Iraqi Free Council responded angrily at JAC's failure to implement the 7+7 formula and condemned its determination to block any call for a general conference.⁴⁰⁴ This led those who attended the 1st London Exploratory conference to meet again on 26th September 1991 to consider the situation in the light of JAC's attempt to stall for time. One result of the meeting was activating the Contact Committee, the name of which was changed to "Contact and National Coordination Committee". The new Committee was entrusted with the responsibility of preparing for the general

⁴⁰²Interview with (pro-Syrian) Ba'th Party representative in London, Mahmud Al-Sheikh Radhi in London on 15th April 1999.

⁴⁰³These were: Mahmud Al-Sheikh Radhi (Ba'th Party), Abdul-Latif Rasheed (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), Muhammad Muhammad Ali (Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution), Ahmad Al-Katib (Islamic Action Organisation), Haider Abbas (Islamic Call), Majid Al-Yassiri (Communist Party) and Majid Al-Haj Hamoud (Secretary, London Branch, Joint Action Committee).

⁴⁰⁴Free Iraqi Council Memorandum to JAC Secretariat Bureau in Damascus, dated 25th September 1991.

conference.⁴⁰⁵

Against this development, the Joint Action Committee felt even more threatened by the goings on in the London arena. The Committee felt compelled to respond to the letters sent by the Contact Committee. On 30th September 1991, the Joint Action Committee wrote to the Contact Committee expressing a desire to participate in any general conference which might be organised. JAC then instructed its representatives in London to expand and include new elements to insure that the Joint Action Committee remained the guiding force of Iraqi opposition. To that end, a 33-member Committee which included a wide range of political orientations was announced. Its members included:

1	Majid Al-Haj Hmoud	(Independent)
2	M. Bahr Al-Uloun	(Independent, Shi'a religious scholar)
3	Hani Al-Fikaiki	(Independent, ex-Ba'thist)
4	Abu Haider Al-Husaini	(Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution)
5	Ibrahim Ahmad	(Independent)
6	Muhsin Daz'ai	(Independent Kurd)
7	Ahmad Al-Chalabi	(Independent)
8	Nawzad Ahmad Aziz	(Independent)
9	Muhammad Hamawandi	(Independent)
10	<i>Ittihad Al Dimocratiyeen</i>	(Union of Democrats)
11	Abdul Sahib Al-Hakim	(Human Rights -Iraq)
12	Laith Kubba	(Independent)
13	Albert Yelda	(Assyrian Movement)
14	Abu Muhammad AlWakil	(<i>Al-Tajammu' Al-Islami Al-Iraqi</i>) (Iraqi Islamic Assembly)
15	Mahmud Shamsa	(Independent)
16	Majid Al-Yasiri	(Iraqi Communist Party)
17	Latif Rasheed	(Kurdish Front)
18	Hoshiar Al-Zibari	(Kurdish Front)
19	Hussein Al-Mousawi	(<i>Jama'at Al-Ulama</i>) (Religious Scholars Group)
20	Abu Ahmad Al-Ja'fari	(Islamic Call Party)

⁴⁰⁵Minutes of the Contact Committee meeting on 26th September 1991.

21	Sa'ad Jawad	(<i>Jund Al-Imam</i>) (The Imam's soldiers)
22	Ahmad Al-Katib	(<i>Munadhamat Al-Amal Al-Islami</i>) (Islamic Action Organisation)
23	Mahmud Sheikh Radhi	(Arab Ba'th Socialist Party)
24	Dalshad Miran	(People's Party of Kurdistan)
25	Muhammad Al-Rubaii	(Democratic Assembly)
26	Ala'Uddin Hussein	(Socialist Party)
27	Hussein Al-Sadr	(Independent)
28	Nouri Al-Bahrani	(Nasserite Unionist Assembly)
29	Haider Abbas	(Islamic Call Party)
30	Muwaffak Al-Ruba'I	(Islamic Call)
31	Subhi Al-Jumaili	(Iraqi Communist Party)
32	Sabah Kadhim	(Independent Iraqi Commission)
33	Ihsan Ali	(Islamic Movement of Kurdistan)

Negotiations between the "Contact and National Coordination Committee" and the "London Branch of the Joint Action Committee" continued until mid-November resulting in agreement on implementation of the 7+7 formula and designating the preparatory Committee for the general conference. It was also agreed that the names of the said Committee should be released on 7th December 1991. Nothing came of this agreement as once again representatives of the opposition fell out with each other over the proportion allotted to each party.⁴⁰⁶

Conscious of the need to overcome the obstacles in the way of unified action against Saddam Hussein, JAC announced in Damascus early in January 1992 that it was planning a general conference for all Iraqi parties opposed to the regime of Saddam Hussein. Although no specific date or venue was fixed, a preparatory Committee for the planned gathering was formed. The Committee included the following groups and personalities:

⁴⁰⁶Memorandum from JAC Secretariat Bureau to JAC London Branch dated 18th November 1991.

1.	The Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution
2.	The Islamic Mission (<i>Al-Da'wah Al-Islamiya</i>)
3.	Kurdish Democratic Party (Masoud Al-Barazani)
4.	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (Jalal Al-Talibani)
5.	Arab Ba'th Socialist Party- the Iraq Command
6.	The Communist Party
7.	Iraqi National Accord (<i>Al-Wifaq Al-Watani Al-Iraqi</i> , Ayad Alawi and Salah Al-Ali)
8.	Iraqi Free Council (<i>Al-Majlis Al-Iraqi Al-Hurr</i> , Sa'ad Jabr and Sadiq Al-Attiya)
9.	Independent Iraqi Group (<i>Al-Hai'a Al-Iraqiya Al-Mustaqilla</i>)
10.	Dr Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun (Shi'a religious scholar)
11.	Islamic Action Organization (<i>Munadhamat Al-Amal Al-Islami</i>)
12.	Iraqi Democratic Assembly (<i>Al-Tajammu' Al-Dimocrati Al-Iraqi</i> , Salih Duglah)
13.	Iraqi Democratic Union, London (<i>Ittihad Al-Dimacratiyeen All-Iraqiyeen</i>)
14.	Democratic Nationalist Assembly (<i>Al-Tajammu' Al-Qawmi Al-Dimocrati</i>)
15.	Assyrian Democratic Movement (<i>Al-Haraka Al-Dimocratiya Al-Ashuriya</i>)
16.	National Reform Movement (<i>Harakat Al-Islah Al-Watani</i> , Sami Izara Al-Ma'jawn)
17.	Supreme Council of Iraqi Tribes (<i>Al-Majlis Al-A'la Lil Asha'er Al-Iraqiya</i> , Hussein Al-Sha'lan)
18.	Islamic Union of Iraqi Turkomans (<i>Al-Ittihad Al-Islami Li Turkoman Al-Iraq</i>)
19.	Socialist Party (<i>Al-Hizb Al-Ishtiraki</i> , Mubdir Al-Wayyis)
20.	Arab Socialist Movement (<i>Al-Haraka Al-Ishtirakiya Al-Arabiya</i> , Abdul Ilah Al-Nasrawi)
21.	Islamic Movement in Kurdistan (<i>Al-Haraka Al-Islamiya Fi Kurdistan</i>)
22.	Iraqi Officers Movement (<i>Harakat Al-Dhubbat Al-Iraqiyeen</i>)
23.	The Islamic Bloc (<i>Al-Kutla Al-Islamiya</i>)
24.	Socialist Party of Kurdistan (<i>Al-Hizb Al-Ishtiraki Al-Kurdistani</i>)
25.	Democratic Union in U.S and Canada (<i>Al-Ittihad Al-Dimocrati Fi America wa Canada</i>) ⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁷Minutes of the 3rd session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2nd Conference of Iraqi opposition parties in JAC headquarters, Damascus on 7th January 1991.

To iron out a working paper reflecting the views, strategies and orientations of the diverse Iraqi opposition groups, a number of specialized Committees were soon formed. These were

1. Foreign Relations Committee
2. Political Committee
3. Administrative Committee
4. Kurdish Question Committee
5. Information Committee
6. Legal Committee
7. Military Committee
8. Financial Committee

Once again, the meeting proved a dismal failure in that it became, as it were, a battlefield where the 'proportion war' was fought.⁴⁰⁸ In short, the participants failed to produce an acceptable plan for convening a national conference. At this juncture, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iran applied joint pressure in order to narrow down the differences between opposition parties. These attempts were doomed to fail.⁴⁰⁹ Despite universal agreement on the necessity to remove Saddam Hussein, the differences were far too deep to be overlooked or covered over as there was no

⁴⁰⁸Interview with London ex-representative of Iraqi Democratic Union, Dr Walid Al-Tamimi on 10th March 1999.

⁴⁰⁹Nawwar, *Iraqi Opposition*, p. 33.

common denominator, or common objectives. However, some members of the JAC London Branch felt that they could no longer coordinate work with the Secretariat Bureau in Damascus. Chief among those was Dr Ahmad Chalabi who called for a meeting at the end of January 1992 to be attended by representatives of all political parties in the United Kingdom. Although the meeting did not attract the same amount of media attention as the Beirut or the First London Exploratory Conferences had done, many consider the Basil Hotel meeting a landmark in the history of Iraqi opposition because it signified a new orientation towards the West, particularly the United States. It was felt that it would be easier to convene a national conference in a European environment rather than a Middle Eastern one. Following a series of meetings, Dr Al-Chalabi received the JAC London Branch approval to proceed with his proposal to hold a national conference on European soil which would be convened in the name of JAC London Branch and not the Damascus based JAC Secretariat Bureau.

Chalabi's call was opposed by the Ba'thists as well as the Communists. During this period the Iraqi National Accord and the Free Iraqi Council became locked in endless internal squabbles which ended with the breaking away of some leading figures from the two groupings. Salah Omar Al-Ali founded the Iraqi National Accord Assembly. He added the word 'Assembly' in order to distinguish it from the original National Accord which Ayad Allawi presided over after Al-Ali's departure. The Free Iraqi Council meanwhile witnessed yet another upheaval. Sadiq Al-Attiya rebelled against Sa'd Salih Jabr and broke away from the Council amid a mass of accusations and counter accusations. Both Ayad Allawi and Sadiq Attiya responded positively to Chalabi's call for a national conference to be held in Vienna.

Failure of Joint Action Committee

The development of Iraqi opposition, especially in the post-Gulf War era, shows that the political groupings were in fact waging two wars on two different fronts: one against the regime of Saddam Hussein; the second against each other. The suspicion and distrust with which opposition leaders view each other is deeper than any reconciliation attempt could ever dispel or lessen, however sincere and disinterested. Greed was another factor. Interest in monopolising financial and moral support from this quarter or that was another factor which divided the opponents of Saddam Hussein. Squabbles over the proportion of representation and insistence on obtaining maximum influence was particularly harmful. Each political grouping, citing its past struggle and sacrifices, wanted to acquire a high proportion of representation before it would agree to attend any conference.⁴¹⁰

Among the other reasons which contributed to the failure in the attempt to forge a united front was the arrogance of the Islamic bloc, which looked down with disdain upon the other political groupings. This arrogance stems from its relatively wide Shi'a support and glorification of its own role in the opposition movement. For these reasons, the Islamic front paid little or no attention to attempts made at coordinating opposition activities. Its leadership still insists it is capable, on its own, of leading the Iraqi masses to victory over Saddam Husein.

The Kurdish question further complicated the task of uniting the opposition groups.

⁴¹⁰Interview with the London representative of the Supreme Council, Dr Hamid Al-Bayati on 15th March 1999. The Islamic bloc insisted that they should be allotted 40% of the seats. The Kurds on the other hand would not accept less than 20%. The leftists and socialists, the so-called Democratic Front also insisted on 20% of the seats. This would leave the Arab nationalists, independent and liberals only 20% which was totally unacceptable to them.

While non-Kurdish parties struggle in order to topple the rule of Saddam Hussein and install a more humanitarian and democratic regime in Baghdad, the Kurds see their struggle through nationalistic eyes. Their aim is not to liberate Iraq from the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein but to achieve some sort of autonomy in the predominantly Kurdish areas in Iraq. In furthering their nationalist cause, the Kurdish movement thinks nothing of contacting Saddam Hussein, negotiating with his regime or concluding agreements with him.

Regional involvement in the affairs of the Iraqi opposition weakened the movement. The hegemony of Syria and Iran, for example, over many of the opposition groups based in their territories may be considered another reason for the paralysis of the opposition movement. In accepting to operate under the wings of Damascus or Tehran, many opposition groups subjected their activities to political considerations directly related to the interests of the host country. Needless to say that neither Syria nor Iran would allow any of its protégé groupings to cross the limits set for them.

Rifts and internal division wreaked havoc on the performance and standing of Iraqi opposition. The widening gap between the London-based groups of *Wifaq* and *Majlis* is a case in point. Among other things, their publications, which were supposed to be dedicated entirely to the discrediting of the Saddam Hussein regime, were for lengthy periods of time, battlefields where personal vendettas and feuds were fought. The Iraqi opposition in exile, says Karen Dabrowska, "are fighting in the same trench- but its guns are not always pointing in the same direction".⁴¹¹ They had no agreed strategy of how to rid Iraq of Saddam Hussein's regime. However, practically each

⁴¹¹Karen Dabrowska, "Fighting in the Same Trench", *New Horizon*, No. 382, June 1991, p. 9.

party or grouping had its own approach to this question. The Islamic groups, for example, believed in armed struggle and popular revolution. The Kurds, on the other hand, often adopted guerrilla tactics to attain their goal of establishing home rule. The Communists were also in favour of armed struggle, while the *Wifaq* group were convinced that the ideal way to topple the regime was either through a military coup or, at least, a palace revolution.⁴¹²

JAC tried hard to lay down a political framework for all groups seeking to overthrow the regime in Baghdad. But the project was met with the insurmountable difficulty resulting from the overpowering political urge of each party to impose its own hegemony on the rest of the groups. JAC furthermore had no public relations philosophy and did not speak with one voice. It failed miserably in mobilising the Iraqis, both among the ex-patriots and inside Iraq, to rally behind its banner or rise against the oppressive regime in Baghdad. Each party was, as it were, blowing its own trumpet. Besides their publications, the Iran-based Islamists had a relatively powerful Arabic-speaking broadcasting station, capable of reaching most of the heavily Shi'a populated areas in southern and south-eastern Iraq. The Syrian-based groups on the other hand had access to the official Syrian media and had their own publications.⁴¹³

⁴¹² Abu Tharr Al-Saghir, *Al-Mukaradha Al-Iraqiya Min Zawiya Ukhra* (Iraqi Opposition: From A Different Point of View)(Beirut: Mukssasat Abu Tharr Lil-Dirasat, 1999), p. 104.

⁴¹³ A detailed list of opposition publications is given in the Bibliography under "Opposition Pamphlets and Newsletters".

Chapter 5: Iraqi Opposition from Vienna to Salah Al-Din: Birth of Iraqi National Congress (INC)

This chapter will discuss the rifts and serious disagreements, which continued to plague Iraqi opposition from the Beirut conference to the emergence of the Iraqi National Congress (INC). Attempts will be made to explore the reasons behind the divisions within each group and to investigate the factors behind the emergence of new hitherto unheard of opposition groups. The factors which led to the convening of the Vienna and Salah Al-Din conferences will be discussed in some detail as these two important gatherings gave rise to a new formula for joint opposition action. They furthermore crystallized a serious attempt to adopt fresh strategies towards the Iraqi regime and the world community at large.

The part played by the Kurdish movement and its support of the opposition, whether in the preparation for the Vienna conference or during the period following it, will also be taken up. It will be seen that the Kurds who had earlier chosen to stay away from the opposition after the Beirut conference, had an immense impact on revitalizing opposition operations against the regime of Saddam Hussein, following their decision to rejoin the Iraqi opposition movement. Their cooperation facilitated the return of the opposition movement to its native homeland.

Towards Vienna: Paving the Way

Despite its failure, the Beirut conference was in many ways the first important step towards harmonizing the efforts of the deeply divided and mutually suspicious Iraqi opposition groups. The widely publicized gathering which was attended by practically all the political parties, small and large, as well as an impressive array of

Iraqi opposition figures produced little in terms of concrete results. The outcome fell far short of the expectations not only of the Iraqis in general but also of those of the participants themselves. The conference, as well as the meetings held outside its halls, did however help crystallize a number of common objectives shared by the all participants. These common objectives may be outlined as follows:

1. That the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the group surrounding him as a precondition for change;
2. Endorsement of the territorial integrity of Iraq;
3. Acceptance of the principles of democratic election and constitutional government;
4. Acceptance of the need for special status [for the Iraqi Kurds] based on a degree of self-government.⁴¹⁴

It is to be noted however that outside the framework of these declared objectives, each party had its own particular agenda which reflected its sectarian, nationalistic or ideological interests. While the Kurds were interested in supporting any regime that recognises their right to self-determination or the establishment of a federal state in which they might have full control of their affairs, the liberals and Democrats were, on the other hand, after a secular democratic government in which the clerics would hold no sway or influence.

As far as the organised Shi'a Islamists were concerned, most of them, especially those based in Iran, were under the influence of Tehran, which openly encouraged them to seek establishment of an Iranian-style Islamic republic in Iraq.⁴¹⁵ This became quite clear in the period immediately following the March Intifada in which

⁴¹⁴Rend Rahim Francke, "The Opposition," in Fran Hazelton, *Iraq Since the Gulf War: Prospects for Democracy* (Zed Books: London, 1994), p. 156.

the Shi'as played a most crucial role. During the period in which the JAC was trying to convene a general conference for the opposition groups, the Shi'as insisted that they get the lion's share of the number of seats.⁴¹⁶

Differences among members of the JAC Committees over the proportion to be allocated to each opposition party in the conference confounded and deepened even further the recriminations and familiar accusations and counter accusations which were later to paralyze and destroy the very existence of the JAC Damascus office. With the differences over the proportion of representation came the insistence of the Shi'a groups that a specific reference be made to the suppression of the Shi'as at the hands of the Saddam Hussein regime. As a precondition for attending the planned conference, they further insisted on recognition of the right of the Islamist Shi'a parties to be at the forefront of any future leadership of post-Saddam Hussein Iraq. This demand further aggravated the problem and angered secular and non-Shi'a groups.⁴¹⁷ Despite these differences which prompted a number of secular and non-Shi'a opposition parties to declare that they would boycott the conference, a majority decided that a meeting should take place.

After long and arduous negotiations it was also decided that "liberated" Iraqi Kurdistan would be an ideal venue for such a long waited patriotic gathering. Contacts were made with the Kurdish parties in control of Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurdish front indicated that they had no objection to holding such a national gathering, provided that the proposed conference should include in its agenda an item

⁴¹⁵Interview with Muhammed Bahr Al-Uloun in London on 5th September 1999.

⁴¹⁶Rend Rahim Francke, "The Opposition", p. 72.

⁴¹⁷Interview with Muhammed Bahr Al-Uloun in London on 5th September 1999.

specifically referring to the right of the Kurds to federalism, not autonomy, as JAC had earlier proposed, as the only acceptable solution to the Kurdish problem. This new dimension confounded the efforts of the JAC and rendered the task of convening the bickering and mutually suspicious groups even more difficult. JAC's failure to mobilize Iraqi opposition groups or to persuade them to get together was a disappointment to Iraqis as well as those following developments in Iraq, although Western intelligence and security experts were not surprised at the lack of success in this matter.⁴¹⁸

The Iraqi National Congress (INC)

To break the impasse, the JAC London Branch came up with a new idea: holding a conference in a European capital, away from regional rivalries and sensitivities. This came after its members had voted overwhelmingly in favour of such an undertaking.⁴¹⁹ The man behind the move to shift the venue of the proposed conference to the West was the wealthy financier Ahmed Chalabi who was little known in Iraqi opposition circles. Chalabi's enthusiasm was largely based on U. S. assurances that he would receive full backing if he succeeded in bringing together the squabbling opposition groups.⁴²⁰ He had received these assurances when he contacted U. S. officials in Washington seeking support for his project.⁴²¹ Following the U. S. promise of support, Chalabi hastened to convince Iraqi opposition of the vital role of the international community, especially the United States, in effecting political

⁴¹⁸James Walker, "Iraqi Opposition Agree to Disagree", *The Times*, 20th February 1992, p. 8.

⁴¹⁹Interview with Mahmud Al-Sheikh Radhi, pro-Syrian Arab Ba'th Socialist Party Politbureau member in London on 1st September 1999.

⁴²⁰David Wurmser points out that strong and clearly worded guarantees from the highest levels of the U. S. government encouraged and protected [Chalabi's] INC. See *Tyranny's alley* (Washington, D. C: The AEI Press, 1999), p. 14.

change in Iraq.⁴²² To that end, he made extensive contacts with a number of opposition groups, veteran politicians and dissident intellectuals in order to mobilize support for the proposed conference. His attempt produced some results. To prepare for the conference, the JAC London Branch created a seven-man Preparatory Committee, often referred to as the Secretariat. Its members were:

1. Muwaffaq Al-Rubai'ee
2. Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun
3. Laith Kubba
4. Hani Al-Fikaiki
5. Ahmad Chalabi
6. Latif Rashid
7. Muhammad Muhammad Ali⁴²³

The Committee held its first meeting at the beginning of February 1992 and agreed to intensify efforts to hold a conference in a European capital. Vienna was chosen as the most appropriate venue on account of its neutrality and also for cost considerations. It was also agreed that the planned gathering will be called the Iraqi National Congress (INC).

On 15th March 1992, a number of known opposition figures and civil rights activists met at the headquarters of Sa'd Salih Jabr's Free Iraq Council to endorse the call for

⁴²¹Interview with Ahmed Chalabi in London on 11th September 1999.

⁴²²Interview with Abdul Hussein Shaban in London on 20th September 1999.

⁴²³Interview with Muwaffaq Al-Rubaiee in London on 2nd September 1999. It is to be noted that the Arab Sunnis were not represented in this Committee. Except for Latif Rasheed who was a Kurd, all the other six members were from the Shi'a sect. Apart from Hani Al-Fikaiki, who was a secular Shi'a and Ahmed Chalabi, a pro-West liberal, all the other members were committed Shi'a Islamists.

the proposed Vienna conference and to express support for the Preparatory Committee of the JAC London Branch. This important meeting was attended by:

1. Dr Sa'ad Jawad
2. Abdul Hussein Sha'ban
3. Muhammad Abdul Jabbar
4. Firyad Hwaizi
5. Sabah Allawi
6. Sami Faraj Ali
7. Petroun Darmou
8. Abul Halim Al-Ruhaimi
9. Muwaffaq Fattouhi
10. Riyadh Al-Yawour
11. Sa'ad Salih Jabr
12. Hussein Haider
13. Sheikh Abu Haider (Muhammad Muhammad Ali)
14. Hani Al-Fikaiki
15. Dr Latif Rashid
16. Tahseem Mu'allah
17. Abdul Amir Allawi
18. Aziz Ullayan
19. Ahmad Abdl Hadi Chalabi (Ahmad Chalabi)
20. Ayad Allawi

The conferees signed a document stressing, among other things, the need for:

- a) thinking out and developing a political discourse that would be acceptable to the opposition groups as well as the outside world

- b) ironing out an appropriate plan for toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein and establishing a body to be entrusted with the task of coordinating opposition work. Such a framework was to be called "the National Council for the Salvation of Iraq".⁴²⁴

Other meetings soon followed. Ahmad Chalabi, Hani Al-Fikaiki, Adeeb Al-Jadir and Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun contacted Masoud Al-Barzani in Vienna to brief him on their initiative in order to enlist the Kurds' support and ensure their presence at the intended conference.⁴²⁵ The response was quite positive. Barzani promised not to spare any effort in making the conference a success, having been assured that the conferees would endorse the Kurdish call for self-determination. Upon conclusion of this deal, preparations for the conference took a more serious turn.⁴²⁶

It was apparent that Ahmad Chalabi was counting heavily on international actors, particularly the United States, whose support he deemed absolutely necessary for any political change in Iraq. Chalabi further boasted that he was able to guarantee American support for the opposition.⁴²⁷ His assertions received some attention, especially as most, if not all of those expressing enthusiasm for the conference, were hoping in effect to resist attempts by the regional powers, particularly that of Syria and Iran to influence the course and outcome of Iraqi opposition work. It is ironic that many nationalists and pan-Arabists preferred to hold the conference in a European capital, away from any of the numerous "fraternal" Arab states.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁴Unpublished minutes of the meeting dated 15th March 1992.

⁴²⁵Interview with Ahmed Chalabi in London on 11th September 1999.

⁴²⁶Interview with ex-Communist Party Politbureau member, Majid Al-Yasseri in London on 1st December 1999.

⁴²⁷Interview with Majid Al-Yassiri on 1st December 1999.

⁴²⁸Interview with Muwaffaq Al-Ruba'ee in London on 2nd September 1999.

The question of financing such an ambitious undertaking was a great source of worry to prospective participants. Abdul Hussein Shaban, who worked closely with Ahmad Chalabi, related that on one occasion Hani Al-Fikaiki asked Chalabi who would “sponsor” the conference and foot the bill; Chalabi quickly responded: “I will”.⁴²⁹ This pledge, coming as it did from an extremely wealthy financier, put an end to these worries. However, Shaban, asserts that the United States had provided Chalabi with enough funds to cover the conference costs.⁴³⁰

In the meantime, the JAC Damascus office kept a close watch over these developments, voicing concern over the turn of events and expressing fear that the proposed conference would undermine its authority and cast a suspicious light on the true identity of Iraqi opposition. Despite the fact that many of its members were not genuinely averse to the holding of the conference in a European capital, they did nevertheless feel quite embarrassed before Damascus and Tehran, both of which kept expressing concern that the JAC was in danger of being sidestepped or even hijacked. Both capitals also feared the consequences of the fact that the London-based groups were attracting some serious international attention, especially from the United States and Britain.

⁴²⁹Chalabi paid \$50,000 while the rest of the conference expenses was paid by the U. S. administration. Interview with Ahmed Chalabi in London on 11th September 1999.

⁴³⁰Interview with Abdul Hussein Sh’ban in London on 20th September 1999. However, in their *Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), Andrew Cockburn and Patrick Cockburn note that the wealthy Chalabi had been recruited by the CIA which welcomed the fact that he was known to be rich as that helped “explain any money that we might be giving him”, p. 51. See also Michael C. Gunter, *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq* (London: St Martin’s Press, 1999) where he points out that “although it is clear that INC has been able to obtain some financing, details were for a long time murky and contradictory”, pp. 44-45.

Scorning JAC's objections to the Vienna project, the JAC London branch succeeded in forming a Committee for the specific task of preparing an agenda for the planned gathering. The Committee included the following members:

1. Leith Kubba
2. Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun
3. Hani Al-Fikaiki
4. Muhsin Daza'ee
5. Latif Rasheed
6. Tahseen Mu'lla
7. Abdul Hussein Sha'ban⁴³¹

Having drawn up a rather extensive agenda for the Vienna meeting, the Committee then extended invitations to 150 opposition figures who were asked to attend, not as representatives of their political organisations, but in their personal capacity. It was thought that such an arrangement would avoid the pitfalls which had confronted JAC and at the same time offer some newcomers a chance to participate as equals and not as representatives of fledgling groups.⁴³² The conference was at first scheduled to take place between 12th and 15th April 1992.⁴³³ The invitation letter, signed by Dr Laith Kubba, on behalf of the "the Conference Secretariat", stated that the intention

⁴³¹Interview with Abdul-Hussein Sh'aban in London on 20th September 1999.

⁴³²Interview with Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun in London on 5th September 1999.

⁴³³This date however was later changed and the conference was held between 16th and 19th June 1992.

of the gathering was “to end the fragmentation of the Iraqi opposition and formulate a workable plan for overthrowing Saddam Hussein”.⁴³⁴

In an attempt to absorb the regional powers’ anger, the Preparatory Committee sent letters to the governments of Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia explaining the reasons which had prompted the JAC London branch to seize the initiative and call for the Vienna conference. They cited the fact that they had been repeatedly disappointed by JAC Damascus office’s prevarication and inaction. The letter addressed to Syrian Vice-President Abdul Hakim Khaddame appealed for help in urging the JAC Damascus office to participate in the conference.⁴³⁵

The letter produced no positive result. In order to thwart the efforts of the London branch, the JAC Damascus office, which suspected that “the London branch was formulating a hidden agenda for the conference”⁴³⁶, resorted once again to delaying tactics.⁴³⁷ To that end, it urgently asked all members of its London branch to come to Damascus for a “decisive session” in order to discuss the best possible means of holding the second general conference and also to “fix the date and venue of the proposed gathering, to settle the question of the proportion of representation and to form a steering Committee”.⁴³⁸ The call fell on deaf ears and preparations for Vienna accelerated. To make sure that as many people as possible attended, the gathering was rescheduled to be held on 16th-19th June 1992, two months after the original date.

⁴³⁴The invitation was published in a JAC (London Branch) press release dated 16th March 1992.

⁴³⁵Preparatory Committee’s letter (unpublished), dated 13th March 1992 and signed by Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloum.

⁴³⁶Karen Dabraowska, “Iraqi Opposition: Sweet Dreams and Harsh Realities,” *Al-Muhajir*, XVI, 15th November 1993, p. 12.

⁴³⁷Interview with Abdul-Hussein Sha’ban in London on 20th September.

⁴³⁸JAC Damascus office Secretariat letter (unpublished) dated 17th March 1992.

Reaction to the Vienna Conference

With the possible exception of the Kurdish Front, almost all opposition groups including the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, JAC Damascus office, Islamic *Da'wah* Party and National Democratic Accord Assembly (*Tajamu' Al-Watani Al-Democrati Al-Iraqi*) expressed anxiety over the way in which the whole affair was handled. Some parties hastened to denounce the call for the conference as suspect and even hostile. As expected, the JAC Damascus office directed the very few members of its London branch who were opposed to Vienna to publicly declare their dissociation from the conference.⁴³⁹ In a press release, just six days before the meeting, those who remained loyal to the JAC Damascus office derided the project as "hasty and premature" and published a press release insisting that it was unwise to hold the conference under the then prevailing conditions and that more time was needed to "ripen the efforts" in order to ensure success.⁴⁴⁰

Sa'ad Salih Jabr's Free Iraqi Council, which had originally welcomed the idea of the Vienna conference, also expressed anxiety over what he called the "JAC London branch's monopoly of all preparatory efforts for the conference". This, Jabr asserted ran counter to "the aspirations of the oppressed masses of the Iraqis, inside and outside Iraq". In a letter addressed to "the brethren, members of the Preparatory Committee", Jabr, speaking for the Council, called for a "wider involvement" of other movements as the Preparatory Committee was "of one colour". While it did not threaten to boycott the scheduled conference, the Council called for an urgent

⁴³⁹Interview with Mahmud Al-Sheikh Radhi, pro-Syria Arab Ba'th Socialist Party Politbureau member in London on 1st September 1999.

“consultative meeting” in order to reconsider the question of representation and “put an end to the policy of creating facts on the ground and putting all opposition groups before a de facto situation”.⁴⁴¹

The Iraqi Communist Party on the other hand expressed “deep regret” that, in stead of consolidating opposition efforts to bring about political change in Iraq, the proposed Vienna conference would intensify ethnic and religious divisions not only among opposition parties but also among Iraqis at large, by upholding sectarian arguments which speak of Iraqis as Sunnis, Shi’as and Kurds. In a statement on the eve of the conference, Communist Party Political Bureau member Fawzi Kerim declared that the Communists would “have nothing to do with the Vienna conference” and that they would boycott its meetings. The only way in which Iraq “might be saved from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein’s regime”, the statement added, “is not to divide the Iraqis into Sunnis, Shi’as and Kurds but to acknowledge its four major forces: the democrats, the Arab nationalists, the Kurdish nationalists and the Islamists”.⁴⁴²

Salah Omar Al-Ali’s *Tajammu’ Al-Wifaq* (Accord Assembly) denounced the conference as “it represents only a segment of the Iraqi opposition” which was not entitled to speak for all opposition groups. Salah Omar Al-Ali feared that the Conference might “endorse calls already heard in certain opposition quarters for negotiations with the Saddam Hussein regime”. In its editorial, *Al-Wifaq*, organ of the *Tajammu’* explained the Kurds’ involvement in the conference by emphasizing that

⁴⁴⁰JAC London Branch Press Release dated 10th June 1992. This is the last document bearing the name of JAC which ceased to exist following the Vienna conference

⁴⁴¹ Iraqi free Council Letter dated 7th April 1992.

⁴⁴²*Iraqi Communist Party, Statement by Comrade Fawzi Karim on the Vienna Conference* (n. p., n. d.) pp. 1-2; see also *Al-Hayat* Newspaper, 14th June 1992, p. 7.

their presence in Vienna did not mean “approval of the conference but a gesture indicating that the Kurds would not abandon opposition work”.⁴⁴³

The Islamist groups also viewed the conference with apprehension and suspicion. The Da’wah Party leadership which remained silent as some of its cadres were engaged in a dialogue with the Preparatory Committee, finally decided to boycott the conference. However, since some of its members were interested in heading for Vienna, no official denunciation was published.⁴⁴⁴ The Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, on the other hand, toyed with the idea of accepting the invitation to Vienna only to decide against it later. No decision was taken until 9th June.⁴⁴⁵ Then, in a press release circulated in Beirut on 19th June, Sheikh Abu Maitham Al-Saghir, spokesman for the Supreme Council, accused those who called for the conference of “playing into the hands of certain international powers which aim to create rifts and divisions among the opposition groups and also to prolong the life of Saddam Hussein’s regime”. In its statement, the Supreme Council asked rhetorically, “How can one expect success or tangible results out of a conference held in Vienna, situated as it is so far away from the fatherland?”⁴⁴⁶ Despite this denunciation however the SCIRI London office representative did appear in the halls of the conference. But the embarrassed Council immediately published a statement emphasizing that its representative, Dr. Muhammad Muhammad Ali (Abu Haider) had been asked to stay away from the conference and that he was sacked upon his

⁴⁴³*Al-Wifaq*, 19th June 1992.

⁴⁴⁴The Kuwaiti newspaper, *Qabas*, 19th June 1992.

⁴⁴⁵Interview with Muhammad Baqir Al-Hakim, *Al-Hayat*, 9th June 1992.

⁴⁴⁶*Al-Hayat*, 19th June 1992.

refusal to comply. His presence was therefore in his own personal capacity and had no bearing on the attitude of the leadership of SCIRI towards Vienna.⁴⁴⁷

The call for convening a conference in Vienna only came after the failure of the Damascus-based JAC to implement one of the Beirut conference recommendations which called for marshalling all anti-Saddam Hussein forces and rallying all opposition groups in a general conference to be held as soon as possible. The Damascus JAC's internal bickering and indecisiveness rendered it almost totally paralysed, making it lose grip on opposition forces. This was a major factor which drove the JAC London office to launch the Vienna initiative. JAC lacked, above all else, cohesion and unity of vision. Most of its members sought to serve their own narrow interests, be they personal, partisan, or sectarian. This ultimately led to a widening of the gulf separating opposition groups from each other. Furthermore, JAC's monopoly of, or attempts at controlling and dominating political opposition to the exclusion of all other opposition groupings estranged many political organisations and prompted them to search for loopholes and ways of breaking this monopoly. On the other hand, a number of weighty opposition figures who had been ignored and sidestepped by JAC Damascus office felt that one way of regaining their prestige or political standing was to move against Damascus-based JAC and discredit it.

The Kurdish question however was among the most important factors which pushed the call for the Vienna conference forward. The Kurds who have repeatedly been at the forefront of opposition work saw in cooperating with those who called for the Vienna conference an important opportunity to apply pressure on the Baghdad regime

⁴⁴⁷Interview with Dr. Muhammad Ali's successor as SCIRI in London, Dr Hamid Al-Bayati in London

which had entered into lengthy but inconclusive negotiations with them.⁴⁴⁸

Understandably, the Kurds would join any effort aimed at bringing them closer to realizing their national dreams in northern Iraq. On the other hand, organisers of the Vienna conference sought to enhance their profile and acquire an added international dimension through alliance with the Kurds, towards whom considerable attention was paid since the gassing of Halabcha and the mass exodus of the Kurds across the borders of Turkey and Iran immediately after the end of Gulf War.

Rifts and Splits Among Opposition Parties

The period from early 1991 to June 1992 witnessed the emergence of dozens of opposition groups hitherto unheard of. Over this short period, the number of groups including the Kurdish as well as the parties operating under the umbrella of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, rose from 20 to almost 100.⁴⁴⁹ This however was a sign of weakness rather than strength. Many of these newly-formed groups included only “a handful of signatories who had no specific vision or programme for political change in Iraq, while other organisations were seen as business opportunities by political entrepreneurs”.⁴⁵⁰ With the increase in the number of new groups, this period also witnessed the eruption of rifts, secessions and division. This was accompanied by virulent attacks, counter attacks and smear campaigns in every direction.

on 15th March 1991.

⁴⁴⁸Interview with Latif Rasheed, PUK London representative, in London on 17th January 2000.

⁴⁴⁹Ibrahim Nawar, *Al-Mu'aradha Al-Iraqiya Wal Sira' Li-Isqat Saddam (Iraqi Opposition and the Struggle to Topple Saddam)*, (London: N Publications, 1993), p. 35.

⁴⁵⁰Interview with Ghassan Al-Attiya in London on 1st October 1999.

Al-Majlis Al-Iraqi Al-Hur (Free Iraqi Council)

In order that we may understand the reasons behind the split of the Free Iraqi Council, it might be necessary to glance at the circumstances under which it was established. In this connection, the first thing to be remembered is that it was hurriedly formed while the second Gulf War was still raging. The first meeting of the founding Committee was held on 10th February 1991, almost three weeks after the beginning of the war against Iraq. The meeting was held at the residence of Sadiq Attiya. The invitation which was sent to almost a hundred Iraqi exiles in Britain was signed by Sa'ad Salioh Jabr, head of the now defunct *Hizb Al-Umma Al-Jadid* (New Nation's Party)⁴⁵¹. During this meeting Sa'd Jabr declared the dissolution of his Nation's Party stressing that he was attending the meeting in his personal capacity and that he expected that those present who came from different political, social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds were doing the same. In a secret ballot, a central Committee, made up of 25 members chaired by Sa'd Jabr, was elected.

Like all other political Iraqi groupings in exile, the council stated as its most immediate objective the toppling of Saddam Hussein, "the cause of all catastrophes which had befallen Iraq and the region".⁴⁵² Its manifesto also reiterated its commitment to democratic and constitutional rule, political plurality and free enterprise as the only means to salvage Iraq from its present quagmire. The Council is also on record as having confirmed its commitment to offering the Kurds the right to self-determination, within a "federal Iraq", an aim which has created a good deal of controversy among Iraqi unionists, both Arabs and Kurds.⁴⁵³ But instead of toiling to

achieve these aims, the Council soon fell prey to the now familiar affliction of internal division.

Hardly a year after the creation of *Al-Majlis* a number of the founding Committee members, headed by Sadiq Al-Attayah, withdrew from *Al-Majlis*. Among the first to leave was Hussein Al-Sadre, the Supreme Guide of the Council. Others soon followed, including the Oxford University professor emeritus Fakhri Shihaband ex-Brigadier Abdul Wahab Al-Amin, one of the early members of the Free Officers Movement which toppled the royal regime in 1958. On 4th February Sadiq Al-Attaya issued a declaration signed by what he called the "Provisional Leadership of the Free Iraqi Council" in which Sa'd Salih Jabr was dismissed by "the majority of the Founding Committee".⁴⁵⁴

When Al-Attaya's attempt to oust Jabr, who controlled the finances and publications of the Council failed, he then hastened to form a rival organisation, called "*Al-Majlis Al-Iraqi Al-Hurr: Al-Hai'a Al-Ta'seesiyah*" (Free Iraqi Council-Founding Committee).⁴⁵⁵ He retained the original name of the Council adding only the two words: "Founding Committee", because most of those who rebelled against Jabr were co-founding members. It is still unclear what caused the rebellion. There are those who attribute the rift to differences over the management of the party's funds. Others speak of Jabr's alienation following various reports which accused him of financial irregularities and establishing contacts with certain elements suspected of maintaining

⁴⁵¹This is obviously an echo of *Hizb Al-Umma* (Nation's Party) which was created by Salih Jabr, Sa'ad's father.

⁴⁵²The text of the party's manifesto, which was dated 10th February, was published in the London based *Al-Sharq Al-awsat* daily on 12th February 1991.

⁴⁵³See paragraph six, under the section entitled, Aims of the manifesto.

⁴⁵⁴"Provisional leadership of the Free Iraqi Council" decision dated 4th February 1992.

links with the regime of Saddam Hussein.⁴⁵⁶ Jabr however denied all these allegations and downplayed the serious rift. He published a press release in which he referred only to the “regretful resignation of some colleagues”. However he did indicate that the reason behind the “rebellion was that those who attacked me were sectarian Shi’as who did not take kindly to my secular and liberal views. Although a Shi’a myself I was accused of standing against the Shi’a cause”.⁴⁵⁷

Al-Wifaq Al-Watani Al-Iraqi (Iraqi National Accord)

The story of the rift which split the *Wifaq* group into two rival camps and pushed many of its original founders to dissociate themselves from the movement is not very different from that of the Council. The only difference is that Jabr disarmed his critics and adversaries by adopting a policy of gracious silence towards the rebels. His references to them in interviews and in the press were surprisingly civil and benign compared with those common in the political discourse of other groups, particularly that of the *Wifaq*.

Al-Wifaq Al-Watani Al-Iraqi (Iraqi National Accord) was born on Saudi soil on 27th February 1991, although its official launch was in March 1991 in Beirut, during the first important gathering of the Iraqi opposition after the first Gulf War. The founding members were mainly ex-Ba’thist enthusiasts living in Europe, particularly in London, and some ex-officers living in Saudi Arabia. Chief among those who attended the Riyadh preparatory meetings were: the physician, Dr Ayad Allawi, the

⁴⁵⁵This group ceased to exist three months after its establishment.

⁴⁵⁶Interview with Hazim Al-Sha’lan member of the Political Bureau of *Al-Majlis Al-Iraqi Al-Hurr-Al-Hai’a Al-Ta’seesiyah* (Free Iraqi Council- Founding Committee) in London on 15th September 1999. See also Nawar, *Opposition*, p. 36; Communiqué dated 21st January 1992 signed by the secessionist leader Sadiq Al-Attiya.

economist, Dr Salah Al-Sheikhli, the physician Dr Tahsin Mu'allah and one of Saddam Hussein's old cronies who was member of the highest ruling body in Ba'thist Iraq, the Revolution Command Council, Salah Omar Al-Ali who comes from Tikrit, birthplace of the Iraqi dictator. For the first few months, it appeared that the *Wifaq* was capable of mobilising serious opposition against Saddam Hussein, as its leadership comprised a number of veteran politicians and some foreign educated intellectuals and professionals. On account of the promise of change they projected, they enjoyed wide support from practically all regional powers. In its heyday, the movement's leaders were received by heads of state and government and were given VIP treatment in many countries in the Middle East.⁴⁵⁸

Although their Ba'thist origin served as a common denominator between most of them, it also carried with it some old rivalries and inherited differences. However, the youngest of the founding members, Ayad Allawi, was elected, by consensus, as the Secretary General of INA.⁴⁵⁹ From the beginning, however, personal differences were apparent between Dr Allawi and Mr Al-Ali from the beginning. According to Dr Salah Al-Sheikhli, "suspicion ruled their relationship and they clashed almost every time the leadership held a meeting".⁴⁶⁰ The strained relationship between the two men continued to deteriorate until 12th February 1992, when Salah Omar Al-Ali convened a meeting in Riyadh which was attended by some Iraqi dissidents living in Saudi

⁴⁵⁷Interview with Sa'ad Salih Jabr in London on 20th September 1999.

⁴⁵⁸Interview with Salah Omar Al-Ali in London on November 20th 1999.

⁴⁵⁹*Baghdad*, organ of Iraqi National Accord, 15th November 1991.

⁴⁶⁰Interview with Dr Salah Al-Sheikhli in London on 15th October 1999.

Arabia, a few of whom, according to ex-Political Bureau Salah Al-Shaikhli, “were members of Iraqi National Accord”.⁴⁶¹

During that meeting, only one item was on the agenda: the proposal to dismiss Dr Allawi for alleged financial and administrative irregularities. The communiqué in which Dr Allawi’s dismissal was contained cited “Allawi’s involvement in sowing the seeds of sedition, division, hatred and discontent” among Iraqi refugees, his dissemination of “lies, fabrications and calumnies” and his refusal to abide by the “*Wifaq* rules of procedure” and persistence in imposing his will on the Executive Bureau.⁴⁶² On 13th May 1992, Salah Al-Ali declared the establishment of a new group to be called *Tajamu’ Al-Wifaq Al-Watani Al-Dimocrati Al-Iraqi* (Iraqi National Democratic Accord Assembly).

Five days after his dismissal, Dr Ayad Allawi, however retaliated by declaring the dismissal order null and void and emphasizing in a press release on 17th February 1992 that Mr Salah Al-Ali was suspended. Allawi continued publication of the weekly *Baghdad* and has retained the original name of *Al-Wifaq Al-Watani Al-Iraqi* (Iraqi National Accord) to this day.⁴⁶³

Al-Ali countered by launching a weekly publication called *Al-Wifaq*, as the organ of the purged organisation. Ironically, this rift helped accelerate the convening of the Vienna Conference. The dismissed members hastened to contact a number of

⁴⁶¹ Interview with Salah Al-Shaikhli on in London 15th October 1999.

⁴⁶² Decision of the “Founding Committee” on 12th February 1992 published in *Baghdad*, the official organ of the *Wifaq*. *Baghdad* is registered in London in the name of Salah Al-Shaikhli and Ayad Allawi in their personal capacity. This is why Ayad allawi, the “dismissed” Secretary General managed to retain the right to continue its publication despite protests by Salah Al-Ali.

⁴⁶³ “Tas-hih” (Correction), *Baghdad*, 17th February 1992.

marginal opposition groups to round up support for a conference to be held in a Western capital, away from the influence of Syria, Iran or Saudi Arabia.

Al-Da'wah Al-Islamiya (Islamic Call)

Objecting to the mounting influence of Iran on the policies and attitudes of Al-Da'wah Party, a number of Party members decided on 11th December 1991 to leave the Party and create a movement of their own, called *Harakat Kawadir Hizb Al-Da'wah Al-Islamiya- Al-Iraq* (Al-Da'wah Party Cadres' Movement-Iraq). Its aim was primarily to shake off any Iranian influence and concentrate on issues directly related to Iraq.⁴⁶⁴ In other words, they sought to stress the Iraqi rather than the regional or international role in the efforts exerted to achieve political change in Iraq. They were especially opposed to the translation of Iranian slogans into Arabic and then adopting them as the Party's own. They also sought closer cooperation with other Iraqi opposition groups regardless of the Iranian attitude towards these groups. The new splinter group was led by Muhammad Abdul Jabbar who was the Information officer of the Da'wah Party in London. In their statement, which was released upon the launch of the Movement they called upon all patriotic Iraqi Islamists to reject any attempt to place the Islamic movement under Iranian custody.⁴⁶⁵

One of the factors which helped the organisers of the Vienna conference bring together so many disparate elements of the Iraqi opposition was the disunity and intra-factional strife which pushed the newly created splinter groups to seek allies

⁴⁶⁴Interview with the Movement's leader, Muhammad Abdul Jabbar in London on 4th October 1999.

⁴⁶⁵Statement on the occasion of the creation of the Cadres dated 11th December 1991.

under the banner of Vienna. Other groups hurried to Vienna to make their voice heard and enjoy recognition as political players in their own right.⁴⁶⁶

The Vienna Conference (16th – 19th June 1992: Major Events)

Except for the two main Kurdish parties, the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) and KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party), practically all major political parties boycotted the conference.⁴⁶⁷ Nevertheless, those who called for the meeting succeeded in assembling 170 delegates, who came from numerous, Islamist, nationalist, democratic and liberal opposition groups. But they attended the conference in their personal capacity, not as representatives of their political movements. Those were not chosen at random but according to a fixed quota agreed by the Preparatory Committee. The quota reflected a tendency to put the secular parties on an equal footing with the Shi'a Islamists, who had more than the lion's share in the previous conference in Beirut and who were insisting on a bigger role in decision making. Chalabi however managed to convince the preparatory Committee of the need to avoid appearing as though the Islamists had the opposition movement under their control, especially after it became apparent that the United States did not favour an Islamist alternative to the regime of Saddam Hussein.⁴⁶⁸ Following a heated debate as to who should get what percentage, an unwritten agreement was reached on the following quota:

1. The Shi'a Islamist trend 35. 3%
2. Democrats, Liberals and Independents 35. 3%
3. The Kurds 23. 5%
4. Turkomans 5. 8%⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁶Interview with Ahmed Chalabi in London on 11th September 1999.

⁴⁶⁷Francke, *Opposition*, p. 172.

⁴⁶⁸Interview with Majid Al-Yassiri on 1st December 1999.

⁴⁶⁹Interview with Head of *Kawadir Hizb Al-Da'wah* (Al-Da'wah Party Cadres) Muhammad Abdul Jabbar in London on 15th September 1999.

Immediately after the opening session, the specialised Committees formed out of delegates as well as some members of the Preparatory Committee started deliberations on the issues referred to them. These Committees were:

1. The Constitutional Committee
2. The Economic Committee
3. Human Rights Committee
4. Fieldwork Coordination Committee:
 - a. Information sub-Committee
 - b. Financial sub-Committee
 - c. Research sub-Committee
 - d. Public Relations sub-Committee

The recommendations contained in the reports of these Committees stressed, among other things, the need to build a democratic Iraq based on equality and justice where the rights of all Iraqis: Arabs, Kurds, Turkomans and other minorities are protected by a new constitution to be promulgated upon removal of the regime of Saddam Hussein from power. The recommendations further stressed the need for the eradication of the racist and chauvinistic policies of “Arabization” and “Ba’thisization” of the Iraqi society. They called for a democratic and free election under international supervision to be held soon after the political change is effected.

Great attention was paid to ex-Iraqi officers living in exile. These were considered valuable assets and every effort should be made to organize them and put their potentials at the service of the revolution against Saddam Hussein. As for the economic future of Iraq, the recommendations spoke of the need to reconsider the trade and industrial priorities in such a way as to provide remedial solutions to its battered economy. Rescheduling Iraq’s massive foreign debts was considered of vital

importance. The need to transfer Iraq's frozen assets to the opposition and the Kurdish area was to be further investigated and discussed with the United Nations and the countries concerned.

Numerous speeches were given at the conference. The opening address was given by Dr Ahmad Chalabi's cousin, Hassan Chalabi. After reiterating that it was necessary to "topple the regime of Saddam Hussein through the cooperation of the Iraqi people with its armed forces", Chalabi asked the conferees to "break the psychological barrier which had frightened them of using such terminologies as "self-determination", "federalism" and "autonomy" when discussing the future of Iraq".⁴⁷⁰

He also stressed the need for Iraqi opposition to coordinate their efforts with "Arab, regional and international powers in a spirit of trust and respect for common interests". He further emphasised the necessity for adopting a "well-balanced, reasonable and calm political discourse" so as to achieve a total break with the practices and policies of Saddam Hussein's Iraq.⁴⁷¹

In his address to the conference, Muhammad Bahr Al-Ulum, a highly respected Shi'a scholar, lauded the March Intifada and called upon the international community to "support our effort to save Iraq from its present tyrannical rule and end the suffering of its masses". He also called for ending the UN imposed sanctions on Iraq and implementation of Resolution 668 which, among other things, deals with the necessity to respect human rights in Iraq. Like other speakers in the conference, he reiterated support for the safe havens in northern and southern Iraq, stressing at the

⁴⁷⁰Address by Dr. Hassan Chalabi in *Watha'iq Al-Mu'tamar Al-Watani Al-Iraqi (Proceedings of the Iraqi National Congress Conference, Vienna 16th-19th June 1992*(n. p., n. d.), p. 120.

⁴⁷¹Chalabi, "Address" in *Proceedings*, p. 121.

same time the need for the Iraqi opposition to speak with one voice. He expressed hope that the future of Iraq would be free from "sectarian and racist oppression".⁴⁷²

Among the significant speeches delivered in the conference was the hour long address of the Kurdish PUK leader Jalal Talibani, who vehemently attacked "the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein which constitutes the only real danger to the Iraqi people and its national unity".⁴⁷³ Talibani went on to stress that unless "this regime is toppled, its evils and atrocities will continue to plague Iraqis, Arabs, Kurds and other citizens as well as the whole region". Looking to the post-Saddam Hussein Iraq, Talibani called for the creation of a "democratic state built on freedom, equality, social justice and a truly independent Iraq founded on national unity and a constitutionally guaranteed right to self-determination for the Kurds within the framework of an independent and Democratic Iraq".⁴⁷⁴ In his remarks on the future of Iraq Talibani looked back in anger at the modern history of Iraq and posed two questions: "What to do once we have toppled dictatorship and become free? What is the alternative?" He then asks rhetorically:

Do we revert to the old Iraqi political structure which was forged by the British occupiers and which was readily accepted and revered by successive reactionary and dictatorial regimes? We utterly reject this structure which was based on injustice, despotism and the rule of a racist and sectarian minority which know no other means to run the affairs of the country except terrorism, dictatorship and the exercise of chauvinistic oppression against the Kurdish people ... and the sectarian oppression of our Shi'a brethren.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷²Bahr Al-Ulum, "Address" in, in *Proceedings*, p. 94.

⁴⁷³Address by Mr Jalal Talibani in *Proceedings*, p. 98.

⁴⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁴⁷⁵Talibani's Address in *Proceedings*, p. 105.

Talibani stressed the fact that the Kurds, like their Arab compatriots in Iraq yearn to live within a unified Kurdish state, pointing out that it would be unfair to force the Kurds to live under conditions determined and dictated by others.

Apart from his call for self-determination, Al-Talibani's address contained practically nothing new within the context of the political discourse of the opposition. His call upon the leadership of the Iraqi opposition forces to use Kurdistan as a base from which to launch operations against the regime of Saddam Hussein is not without significance.⁴⁷⁶ It manifests a strong desire to acquire a more important role for the Kurds in deciding the future course of Iraq. Through this invitation Talibani also hoped to enlarge the profile of the Kurds and thus push forward the newly declared demand for a separate Kurdish entity within a federal Iraq.

Unlike Talibani who unambiguously stressed the need for the creation of a federal Iraq, KDP leader Masoud Barzani, through his representative at the conference referred in general and vague terms to the need for what he called a "patriotic alternative to solve the Kurdish question".⁴⁷⁷ Hoshiar Zibari, who spoke for Masou'd Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party reiterated the common and inseparable destiny of Arabs and Kurds, stressing the spirit of fraternity and partnership "within a unified democratic Iraq".⁴⁷⁸

In his speech, Muhammad Al-Alousi, a Sunni Arab Islamist felt that the whole atmosphere of the conference smacked of ethnic (Kurdish) and sectarian (Shi'a)

⁴⁷⁶Talibani's Address in *Proceedings*, p. 103.

⁴⁷⁷Address by Hoshiar Zibari in *Proceedings*, p. 128.

⁴⁷⁸Address by Zibari, *Watha'iq*, p. 127.

prejudice against the Sunni Arabs.⁴⁷⁹ He therefore attempted to provide what he considered an objective and unbiased view of the regime of Saddam Hussein through his emphasis on the fact that Saddam Hussein did not target any specific sect, group or party, but oppressed all Iraqis regardless of their ethnic, cultural, social or religious background. Saddam Hussein massacred “Communists as well as Ba’thists, Sunnis as well as Shi’as, Arabs as well as Kurds, Jews and Christians as well as Muslims”.⁴⁸⁰

Of the 170 who attended the Vienna gathering, a “national assembly”, made up of 87 members was created. Seventeen of them were chosen to sit on the “Executive Committee”. These were:

Muhsin Daza’ee	KDP	Kurd	London & Kurdistan
Hoshiar Zibari	KDP	Kurd	London & Kurdistan
Latif Rashid	PUK	Kurd	London & Kurdistan
Sadi Ahmad Pira	PUK	Kurd	Austria & Kurdistan
Muhd. Abdul Karim	Islamist (I)	Shi’a	London
Laith Kubbah	Islamist (I)	Shi’a	London
Akram Al-Hakim	OIM	Shi’a	Syria
Muhd. Al-Alousi	IB	Sunni	Riyadh
Aziz Aliyan	UID	Shi’a	London
Sami Azara	MNR	Shi’a	London
Salah Al-Shaikhli	<i>Wifaq</i>	Sunni	London
Muhd. Abdul Jabbar	<i>Da’wah</i>	Shi’a	London
Aziz Qadir	Turkoman (I)	Sunni	London

⁴⁷⁹Interview with Muhammad Al-Alousi in London on 20th August 1999. Al-Alousi pointed out that his speech, contained in a working paper submitted to the Secretariat was not included in the Proceedings of the conference.

⁴⁸⁰Interview with Muhammad Al-Alousi in London on 20th August 1999.

Hussein Shalan	I	Shi'a	London & Riyadh
Ali Abd Al-Aziz	IMK	Kurd	London & Kurdistan
Ahmad Chalabi	I	Shi'a	London
Abdul Hossein Shababan	I	Shi'a	London ⁴⁸¹

The Final Communiqué of the Vienna Conference

The final communiqué of the Vienna gathering dealt with a number of issues at the forefront of which was the necessity to use all available means to topple of the regime of Saddam Hussein so as to put an end to “sectarian and racial discrimination” in Iraq and establish “the rule of law” which respects human rights and guarantees civil liberties to all Iraqis “regardless of their ethnic, religious or social background”.

The communiqué recognised the diversity of Iraq’s ethnic, social and religious backgrounds. It called for total equality among all Iraqis recognising the rights of the Kurds to self-determination within a unified Iraq. The conference also called for “granting the rights of the Turkomans and Assyrians both culturally and administratively”. The conference also stressed the need to end the “injustices from which the Shi’a Arab majority have been suffering”. The participants hailed the democratic elections which had taken place in Iraqi Kurdistan deeming them a significant step towards the establishment of democratic rule in Iraq. Specific

⁴⁸¹ DUK Democratic Union of Kurdistan
I Independent
IB Iraqi Bloc
IMK Islamic Movement in Iraqi Kurdistan
KDP Kurdish Democratic Party
MNR Movement for National Reform
OIM Organisation of Islamic Movement
UID Union of Iraqi Democrats

references were made to Iraq's war with Iran and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. These were blamed on "Saddam Hussein's recklessness and insistence on waging a war, the consequences of which were already known".

From the time the idea of the Vienna conference was first broached until its conclusion, the procedures followed by the Preparatory Committee sometimes sacrificed democracy for expediency and consensus. In addition to a general assembly of 87, the conferees also elected an executive Committee of 25 charged with carrying out the recommendations of the general assembly. The main tasks of the general assembly were to:

1. Deal in the name of the Iraqi people with the international community, particularly with neighbouring countries
2. Seek to obtain the right to use the frozen assets of the Iraqi government for financial relief and liberation efforts
3. Work towards the adoption of UN resolutions forbidding the Iraqi regime to use sophisticated heavy weapons to suppress the popular uprisings

The communiqué paid the Iraqi Armed Forces considerable attention, pledging to restructure these forces in a such a way as to guarantee their respect of the constitution, dedication to building the nation and defending its soil, away from the course of conspiracies, aggression and narrow-minded loyalties.

On the economic level the conference expressed its support of private enterprise, emphasising at the same time the role of the state in development process. While all attempts aimed at weakening the regime of Saddam Hussein were supported, the

continuation of the economic embargo of Iraq was a source of great concern, as its heavy burden is borne by the Iraqi masses.

The Vienna Conference Assessed

The Vienna Conference was the fruition of the efforts of the Preparatory Committee of the JAC London Branch which took upon itself to organise a broadly based gathering of opposition forces seeking to effect political change in Iraq. The fact that the conference did take place is, in itself, a great success given the complexities and inter-party rivalries, jealousies and deep suspicions among the opposition groups. Attendance was quite impressive, despite the boycott declared by most parties on the one hand and the Committee's insistence that conferees should abandon their partisan identity before they entered the conference hall, on the other. Despite its shortcomings the conference furthermore provided organised opposition work with a political frame of reference, becoming at the same time, as it were, a foundation upon which future political organisational structure could be built.

On the negative side, the Vienna Conference marginalised the role of political parties, concentrating instead on individuals. The conference moreover attached such great significance to the international factor, that the role of Iraqis in effecting political change was almost eclipsed. It was noticeable that Sunni Arabs were scantily represented. Marginalization of the Sunni role throws some suspicion on the orientation of the conference, as it ignores the political realities inside Iraq. It became apparent that the conference was consumed with the Kurdish and Shi' questions to the exclusion of the suffering of the Sunnis at the hands of the Saddam Hussein regime. The open support of the UN-imposed exclusion zones in northern and southern Iraq however was seen by many as a serious mistake, not just a public

relations blunder. This stance gave Iraqis and others in the region the impression that the partition of Iraq was not an alarmist fabrication of Saddam Hussein intended to rally internal support around him, but a real threat to Iraq's territorial integrity.

The main objective of the organisers of the Vienna conference was to offer an alternative to the idle JAC Damascus office, which had become handicapped by the Syrian regime's political interests and inhibited by the wider inter-Arab and regional rivalries. The aim was to use a gathering in a European capital to build a new political structure. This would incorporate and embrace all the main trends of Iraqi society and develop a strong and united, rather than unified, opposition movement, which would share one common goal: the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime. It would enjoy the international community's support and be able to present a serious challenge to the regime in Baghdad.

Thus, the hope was that the conference would be able to achieve rather an over-ambitious objective, and that the gathering could emerge and produce a credible substitute for the fragmented opposition movement whose leaders were, as the Beirut Conference attested, deeply divided, suspicious and acrimonious. Furthermore, the conference was based on the assumption that despite their different ideological orientations, religious and ethnic loyalties, those politically active individuals who were invited to participate in the conference would be able to disconnect themselves from their backgrounds and commitments to one political group or other and be assimilated into the new political structure.

Certain organizers, namely Ahmad Chalabi, realised that the Iraqi opposition movement was a potentially viable movement with wide appeal, but seriously suffering from a leadership vacuum. He perceived the conference as a golden

opportunity to present himself as an independent leader unconnected to any of the main ideological or ethnic groups. Chalabi's enthusiasm was displayed in his effort to organise and influence the conference, motivated by his broad personal ambition and a position underpinned by his impressive academic and business credentials, reputed personal wealth, reinforced by noticeable links with Western governments, particularly the United States.

Preparations for the Salah Al-Din Conference

Despite its many shortcomings, the Vienna conference managed to focus world attention on the political apparatus which came into being in the Austrian capital, INC. From Vienna onwards, it was possible to speak of the INC as a major umbrella organisation for opposition to the regime of Saddam Hussein. For it soon established offices in London, Salah Al-Din and Washington with an information network and, later on, created a broadcasting station. It also sponsored foreign tours for opposition figures and facilitated contacts between its members and the international community. Among the first tours to be organised by INC was that which both Kurdish leaders Barzani and Talibani to Washington in the second week of August 1992.⁴⁸² Although details of the meetings with U.S. officials have not emerged, it is thought that the American administration had urged the opposition parties to present a united front if it sought international recognition. On his way home, Masoud Barzani stopped in Damascus to invite INC and non-INC members to meet in Kurdistan, in order to prepare for a second but broader-based gathering of the opposition. While in

⁴⁸²Kamiran Husni, "Al Dhaw' Ziyarat Wafd Mutamar Vienna Lilmuaradha Ila Washington"(In the light of the Visit by the Opposition Vienna Conference Delegation to Washington", *Al-Hayat*, p. 7, 7th August 1992.

Damascus Barzani discussed his initiative with the Syrians who indicated, as he later pointed out, “their full support to any effort exerted to unite Iraqi opposition”.⁴⁸³

The reasons which prompted Barzani to engage himself so directly with the opposition which he had abandoned immediately after the Beirut conference are not difficult to discern. To the Kurds, the widely acclaimed INC, which had the backing of Washington and the West in general, provided new possibilities. The planned meeting on “national soil seemed a step forward from the Beirut and Vienna conferences. For the first time since the end of the second Gulf War, the opposition would meet on the Iraqi field of battle, away from the pressures and calculations of the regional and international powers. In reality however Kurdistan was a “U. S. protectorate” as it was and remains a “safe haven” protected albeit only from the air by U.S., British and, for some time, French planes.

Iraqi Kurdistan: The Post-Gulf War Era

The international U.S-led campaign to dislodge Saddam Hussein’s troops from Iraqi-occupied Kuwait offered the Kurds new possibilities and revived old aspirations, as they had been fighting the regime of Saddam Hussein, long before the West could even see through the policies of the “Butcher of Baghdad”.⁴⁸⁴ Despite initial hesitation, many Kurds welcomed the Gulf War, believing it to “put an end to Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship”.⁴⁸⁵ Rebellion followed immediately after Saddam

⁴⁸³ “Barzani Discusses Initiative to Unite Iraqi Opposition”, *Al-Hayat*, 27th August 1992.

⁴⁸⁴ In her TV interview with Saddam Hussein, excerpts from which were aired on June 20th 1999 on ABC, an American broadcaster told President Saddam Hussein in Baghdad that Western media was beginning to portray him as a dictator calling him, among other things, the Butcher of Baghdad. Saddam Hussein scoffed at the idea, stressing all these accusations were lies. See Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political Analysis* (London: St Martin’s Press, 1999), p. 36.

⁴⁸⁵ Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq: Tragedy and Hope* (London: MacMillan, 1997), p. 50.

Hussein's defeat especially as the Kurdish leadership "became aware that the morale of the remaining units was low and that the numbers of deserters and of reservists who failed to report for duty was high".⁴⁸⁶ For a variety of reasons, similar to those which had led to the failure of the southern Intifada, the rebellion collapsed after a dramatic initial success in which most of the Kurdish cities fell with unimaginable speed. It is now commonplace to speak of the huge territorial gains made by the Kurds as having little strategic importance as they could not be held against the better equipped and battle-hardened Iraqi troops, once they devoted their attention to this question.⁴⁸⁷

Saddam Hussein's response came much sooner than any had expected. Immediately after he crushed the Intifada in the south, his troops marched forward and speedily recaptured Iraqi Kurdistan in full view of the whole world which had been allied by its rejection of Saddam Hussein's regime. There were of course reasons for the indifference shown by the outside world to this development. Among a number of expedients and political considerations, Western fears that Iraq might be Balkanized and the possibility, perhaps even certainty, that intervention in support of the Kurdish cause might anger Turkey, Syria and Iran which also have Kurdish minorities, pushed the West to allow Saddam Hussein to retake the northern and north-eastern part of his country.

⁴⁸⁶Anthony H. Cordesman and Ahmed S. Hashim, *Iraq: Sanctions and Beyond* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), p. 76.

⁴⁸⁷Gunter, *Kurds*, p. 52.

Mass Exodus

Although the Kurdish resistance was expelled from the large cities of Kurdistan, it nevertheless succeeded in establishing a de facto autonomy for the Kurds in a large area, since even after Saddam Hussein's onslaught, Kurdish fighters continued to hold the mountainous area.⁴⁸⁸ But Saddam Hussein who had been allowed by the U.S.-led allies to retain some if not most of his elite forces mainly to keep the Shi'a population of the south in check, used his tanks and artilleries ruthlessly against the Kurds in the north. Saddam Hussein's forces, now fighting against disorganised armed civilians and paramilitary units and not against the most formidable powers in the world, used all it could to defeat the Kurdish resistance and restore what was left of the reputation it lost in Safwan⁴⁸⁹. The crushed Kurdish rebellion had a tragic outcome: the fleeing by any means of hundreds of thousands of Kurds fearing the wrath of Saddam Hussein into the mountains along the Turkish and Iranian borders had "turned roadways into ribbons of humanity". During April and May 1991, "under some of the most despicable conditions imaginable, approximately 1.5 million Kurds had fled to Iran and another 450,000 to Turkey".⁴⁹⁰ Many of the refugees from Kirkuk and other northern cities told Human Rights Middle East Watch that

They had witnessed attacks by Iraqi helicopters on the columns of the fleeing Kurdish civilians, or reported passing refugees along the escape routes who had been wounded or killed in such attacks. Taken together, the testimonies suggested that they were not

⁴⁸⁸Gunter, *Kurds*, p. 59. According to a Human Rights Watch report, the Kurds "control 16,000-square miles, roughly one-tenth of Iraq, and four fifths of the land claimed by Iraqi Kurds as their ancestral homeland. The zone includes two of Iraq's Governorates (Suleimaniyya and Duhuk), and much of a third (Arbil). Its current population of about three million inhabitants is almost entirely Kurdish, with small numbers of Turkomans and Christians (Assyrians, and Armenians)". See *Endless Torment: The 1991 Uprising In Iraq And Its Aftermath* (New York: Human Rights Watch/Middle East, 1992), p. 12.

⁴⁸⁹The humiliating cease-fire conditions were signed in a tent, in place called Safwan along the Iraqi-Kuwaiti boarder.

⁴⁹⁰Gunter, *The Kurds*, p. 84.

isolated events. There were also reports of attacks on refugees by tank fire.⁴⁹¹

The political, economic and cultural impact of the Kurdish mass exodus to southern Turkey was so overwhelming that there were those in Turkey who thought the flow of refugees was “the sneakiest form of aggression” by Saddam Hussein.⁴⁹² Apart from the quite heavy financial cost of hosting hundreds of thousands of Kurdish refugees, Turkey was especially concerned that Iraqi Kurds might lend support to separatist Kurdish movement in Turkey led by the Communist Kurdish Party, Kurdistan Workers Party, better known as the PKK. It was for this reason that Turkish attitude towards the displaced Kurds of Iraq was ambivalent: hospitality, albeit lukewarm, towards the uninvited new comers and deep concern that they might overstay their welcome in which case Turkey’s own Kurdish problem might be further complicated.

The Kurdish Safe Haven

Responding to the crisis, Turkish President Turgut Ozal, who once described Saddam Hussein to President George Bush as “the most dangerous man in the world”,⁴⁹³ hastened to find a solution that might meet the humanitarian needs of the dislocated Kurds and at the same time spare Turkey the heavy economic and political burden the refugees’ influx might entail. On April 15th 1991 “Operation Provide Comfort”, which had received strong backing from United Kingdom Prime Minister John Major and French President Francois Mitterand, was launched. This Nato-led Operation, as it

⁴⁹¹Human Rights Watch, *Endless Torment*, p. 65.

⁴⁹²Gunter, *The Kurds*, p. 54.

⁴⁹³Amatzia Baram, *Building Toward Crisis: Saddam Hussein’s Strategy For Survival* (Washington, D. C.: Washington Institute For Near East Policy, 1998), p. 111.

soon emerged, was basically not “strictly a humanitarian gesture”.⁴⁹⁴ Its primary aim was “appeasing Turkey” rather than looking after the immediate humanitarian needs of the displaced Kurds. ‘Provide Comfort’ soon transferred this role to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).⁴⁹⁵ To provide a climate of security for the local populations and the international humanitarian personnel who were operating in a precarious environment, an “exclusion” or “no fly” zone was imposed on the areas lying north of the 36th parallel.⁴⁹⁶ Regardless of the legality of the “Safe Haven”, with all its connotations and implications of a humanitarian purpose, it was in many ways a pragmatic expedient which was not without some self-serving motives. This was particularly true of on the part of Turkey which strongly supported Operation Provide Comfort. Turkey’s overriding concern was the fear that Iraqi Kurdistan might become a base for the PKK in its war against the Turkish authorities.

Soon after Masoud Barzani’s Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and Jalal Talibani’s Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) established themselves as the uncontested masters of Iraqi Kurdistan, they approached Saddam Hussein in an attempt to reach a new autonomy deal. In negotiating with Saddam Hussein, the two leaders angered all non-Kurdish opposition groups which saw the Kurdish move as an act of betrayal. Furthermore the two leaders acted without the support or approval of the regional or

⁴⁹⁴David Wurmser, *Tyranny’s Ally: America’s Failure to Defeat Saddam Hussein* (Washington, D. C. : The AEI Press, 1999), p. 11.

⁴⁹⁵Dlawer Ala’Aldeen, “Playing by the Rules” in Franz Halliday, ed., *Iraq Since The Gulf War* (London: Zed Books, 1994), p. 234. See also Anthony N. Cordesman and Ahmed S. Hashim, *Iraq: Sanctions and Beyond* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), p. 78.

international powers.⁴⁹⁷ In a letter addressed to Masoud Barzani, Free Iraqi Council leader Saad Salih Jabr vehemently attacked the Kurdish move and called upon the Kurdish negotiators to reconsider their position, singling out the exchanges of kisses with Saddam Hussein when the blood of Iraqi people “has not yet dried”.⁴⁹⁸ Regardless of the hype that accompanied these long protracted talks, both parties were merely buying time. Saddam Hussein was trying to regroup the remnants of his defeated army. The Kurds, on the other hand, were doing all they could to round up international support to their cause. It is significant that halfway through the negotiations with Saddam Hussein, Talibani embarked upon a seven-nation tour “to solicit support for the next phase of the struggle”, leaving his partner whom he “fully authorized” to complete the dialogue with the Baghdad government.⁴⁹⁹ The negotiations however failed to meet the Kurdish demands. As a result, Saddam Hussein imposed an embargo on the Kurdish areas, withdrawing at the same time government officials and economic support.⁵⁰⁰ From then onwards Iraqi Kurdistan existed in a state of limbo, still part of Iraq yet under the political control of Kurdish parties and largely cut off from the rest of the country by an economic embargo imposed the Iraqi Government.⁵⁰¹

The situation in Kurdistan soon turned chaotic with Kurdish militias running their areas as personal fiefs. Despite the problems posed by corruption, need and insecurity

⁴⁹⁶Muhammed Ahmad, *Regional and International Influences on Iraqi Kurdistan: 1991-1996*, Unpublished M. A. Thesis, University of London SOAS (1997), p. 37.

⁴⁹⁷Ahmad, *Influences*, p. 39.

⁴⁹⁸Gunter, *Kurds*, p. 62. See also Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political analysis* (London: St Martin's Press, 1999), p. 28.

⁴⁹⁹Gunter, *Kurds*, p. 72.

⁵⁰⁰Ahmad, *Influences*, p. 38.

⁵⁰¹Sarah Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam: The Politics of Intervention in Iraq* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), p. 213.

and contrary to what the Baghdad regime had expected, the impact of these developments which had resulted from the internal embargo hardened Kurdish resolve and in fact pushed them to seek another alternative: the election of a legislative council not simply to fill in an administrative vacuum, but to create a decision making centre and establish a constitutional and legal entity to act as the Kurdish northern government.⁵⁰² Some went further and hoped that the Kurds could

“provide a democratic model for the rest of Iraq”.⁵⁰³

Elections in Kurdistan

To that end, and in the face of severe denunciations by Baghdad that the elections were an act high treason, the voting did take place on 19th May 1992. The results of the parliamentary voting, which was not seriously contested by the participating parties, showed a slight edge for Al-Barzani's KDP over Talibani's PUK, with the former winning 50.22, the latter 49.78 percent of the vote.⁵⁰⁴ To placate regional and international powers, both Al-Talabini and Barzani, who were different in their attitudes and approaches to solving problems, hastened to reiterate that they were not seeking full independence, but it is difficult to believe that they were not yearning to establish an independent state.⁵⁰⁵

Since no decisive victory by either party was achieved in assembly seats, the two

⁵⁰²Gunter, *Kurds*, p. 89.

⁵⁰³Falaq Al-Din Kakai, “The Kurdish Parliament,” in Fran Hazelton, ed, *Iraq: Since the Gulf War* (London: Zed Books, 1994), p. 119.

⁵⁰⁴Gunter, *Kurds*, p. 92. .

⁵⁰⁵ Interview with INC External Relations chairman, Hoshiar Zibari in London on 15th January 2000.

leaders agreed to put aside their differences and accept a joint leadership position with the KDP willingly ceding one of its assembly seats to the PUK.⁵⁰⁶ To make up the government, a coalition formula was adopted:

The head of parliament is a member of the KDP. The head of council of ministers (the prime minister) is a member of the PUK. Each has a deputy from the other party. The ministries were formed in a similar way: as a general rule, a minister from one party has a deputy from the other. There are also ministers from the Assyrian Democratic Movement and the Communist Party.⁵⁰⁷

Federation: A New Objective

The success of the Kurdish Front in forming a coalition regional government on 19th May 1992 came just a month before the Vienna Conference which both parties attended. Speaking from a relatively strong position and with a spirit of hope, the Kurdish Front asked their Arab opposition counterparts to recognise the Kurds' right to self-determination with the word 'federalism' being floated about. The Front also demanded to receive some of the frozen Iraqi funds abroad. In effect the Kurds were seeking recognition of their "de facto government and state in the area of northern Iraq under their control".⁵⁰⁸

To the dismay of a number of opposition groups, the Kurdish Parliament became even more vociferous about federalism, which it saw as the solution to the whole Kurdish problem. On 4th October 1992, it issued a communiqué in which it briefly

⁵⁰⁶Ahmad, *Influences*, p. 40.

⁵⁰⁷Teresa Thornhill, *Sweet Tea With Cardamom: A Journey Through Iraqi Kurdistan* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 211; Kakai, *Parliament*, p. 123.

⁵⁰⁸Gunter, *Kurds*, p. 95.

surveyed the reasons behind depriving the ancient nation of "its legitimate right to independence". The Lausanne Treaty of 1923 had dashed Kurdish hopes for the independent state promised them by the Treaty of Sevres of 1920. Then came the successive revolts against the central governments in Baghdad, in response to their failure to abide by article 3 of the provisional constitution issued after the 14th July 1958 revolution. Referring to the long suffering of the Kurds at the hands of the Saddam Hussein regime, the comuniqué pointed out that international sympathy for the Kurds was aroused only after TV footage of the mass exodus which followed the collapse of the March Intifada had been shown worldwide. The communiqué concludes with an historic recommendation:

Exercising its duties and its rights to decide the destiny of Iraqi Kurdistan in accordance with international commitments and conventions, has agreed unanimously to specify the legal relationship with the central government of Iraq as one of *federal union* within a parliamentary, democratic Iraq based on a multi-party system and respect for human rights.⁵⁰⁹

The Shaqlawa Exploratory Talks

Following the formation of the INC in Vienna, which embraced a number of JAC powers and individuals including the Kurdish front, the JAC Damascus office practically ceased to function and soon disappeared from the political scene. However, the Preparatory Committee which the JAC Damascus office had entrusted with the task of organising a second conference made one last attempt at reviving the

⁵⁰⁹Italics mine. Text of the Kurdish Parliament Communiqué dated 5th October 1992, in Kakai, *Parliament*, p. 132.

JAC. It called upon the Vienna Conference members as well as a number of other opposition figures to attend an enlarged meeting to be held in Damascus in August 1992. The response to the call was quite negative. With the collapse of this project, JAC ceased to exist, although its members who went their separate ways continued political work but under the banner of their own political groups.

In August 1992 Masoud Barzani visited Damascus within the framework of an extended tour organised by the INC in order to enlist regional and international support for the Iraqi opposition. Having secured Damascus's blessing for holding a general conference in Kurdistan, Barzani met twice with members of the defunct JAC who had boycotted the Vienna conference and invited them to engage in a national dialogue with a view to promoting and enhancing coordination among opposition parties. To create a new mechanism acceptable to all prospective participants, it was agreed to create an "Opposition Dialogue Committee". It was made up of the following:

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Masoud Barzani* | ⁵¹⁰ KDP leader |
| 2. Jalal Talibani* | PUK leader |
| 3. Dr Kemal Fuad* | Kudish Front |
| 4. Sami Abdul Rahman* | Kurdish Front |
| 5. Yaqoub Yousuf Yunadim | Assyrian Democratic Movement |
| 6. Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun* | Shi'a Religious Scholar |
| 7. Ayad Allawi* | National Accord |
| 8. Ahmad Chalabi* | Independent |

⁵¹⁰Except for Barzani who delegated Hoshiar Zibari to represent him, the asterisks signify that relevant member had attended the Vienna conference.

9. Mahdi Al-Ubaidi	Ba'th Party
10. Mubdir Al-Wayyis	Socialist Party
11. Gen. Hasan Al-Naqib*	Independent Iraqi Group
12. Ibrahim Al-Ja'fari	Al-Da'wah
13. Muhammad Al-Haidari*	SCIRI
14. Muhsin Al-Husaini	Islamic Action Organisation
15. Abbas Al-Bayati	Islamic Union of Iraqi Turkomans
16. Munawar Al-Habib	Supreme Council of Iraqi Tribes
17. Mudhaffar Arsalan*	Turkoman Nationalist Party
18. Rashid Al-Hadithi	Accord Assembly
19. Shafiq Al-Qazzaz	Free Iraqi Council
20. Rahim Ajeena	Iraqi Communist Party

At the Shaqlawa preparatory meeting, Masoud Barzani, who was speaking from a position of strength after his victory, albeit by a very small margin, in the Kurdish elections, welcomed the delegates and once again reiterated his wish to see all opposition parties united. Referring to the Beirut and Vienna conferences, which were boycotted by so many parties and movements, Barzani hoped that their present endeavour would be more successful as it sought to enlarge voluntary participation in organised opposition work.⁵¹¹ He then touched upon the situation in Kurdistan and pointed out that the Kurds had over a short period of time built their own democratic institutions, that the "autonomy" which they theoretically enjoyed under the Bath regime had become anachronistic and that it had become necessary for all freedom

⁵¹¹Text of address by Masoud Barzani at the Shaqlawa preparatory meeting on 23rd September 1992.

lovers to recognise the Kurds' right to self-determination "Federalism will not partition Iraq and the Iraqis are capable of safeguarding their national unity".⁵¹²

In the discussions which followed, Ahmad Chalabi stressed that he had accepted the invitation to attend because he was interested in broadening the base of INC, which had created a mechanism for opposition work. By way of indirect self-aggrandizement he further pointed out that through contacts initiated by INC, the United States, Britain and France had accepted to release one billion dollars of the frozen Iraqi funds abroad. He added that the south must be protected from the atrocities of Saddam Hussein and should therefore be declared a safe haven.⁵¹³

In his comments on what Chalabi had pointed out, Jalal Talibani agreed that "the Shi'as were being tortured" and that "we should create the proper circumstances for them and enable them to receive humanitarian needs. There is a genocide going on in the south".⁵¹⁴ He then commented on the future relationship between Arabs and Kurds in Iraq and indicated that in the following few days, the Kurdish parliament would promulgate a constitution for Kurdistan which contains a specific reference to federation. Talibani asked those present to support the coming move or else "we would not be able to deal with you".⁵¹⁵ He then moved on to the thorny question of proportional representation. After a long heated debate in which each party was trying to inflate its power and popular base the following percentages were accepted:

⁵¹²Interview with Abdul Hussein Shaban in London on 2nd October 1999.

⁵¹³Interview with Mahmud Al-Sheikh Radhi, pro-Syrian Arab Ba'th Socialist Party Politbureau member in London on September 1st 1999.

⁵¹⁴*Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ Interview with Abdul Hussein Shaban on 2nd October 1999.

35% Islamists (33% Shi'a, 2% Sunnis)

25% Kurds

6% Turkomans

16% Arab Nationalists

3% Communists

3% Assyrians and Christians

4% Democrats

4% Liberals

4% Iraqi Tribes ⁵¹⁶

It was further agreed that:

1. a general conference for Iraqi opposition be held in Kurdistan in October 1992
2. the Arabic word 'Muwahhad'(Unified) be added to the 'Iraqi National Congress' although the English acronym INC should remain unaffected because it had gained wide circulation.
3. the planned conference should establish three leadership bodies: the general assembly, the executive Committee and the presidential council
4. that the general assembly of the planned conference should be made up of 174 members: 87 new members plus the other 87 members of the Vienna conference general assembly

⁵¹⁶ Interview with Abdul Hussein Shaban, Secretary of the INC Executive Committee on 2nd October 1999. This agreement was never written or published.

5. a preparatory Committee should be formed to extend invitations and take charge of all arrangements necessary for the planned conference. The preparatory Committee should include: three members from the Islamists (Da'wah, SCIRI, Islamic Action Organisation), three from the Vienna Conference (Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun, Ahmad Chalabi and Tahseen Mualla), two from the Kurdish Front, one Arab Nationalist and one Communist.

At the conclusion of its five days meetings, the Dialogue Committee issued a final communiqué in which it emphasised its resolve to work towards creating a proper mechanism that would ensure coordination and full cooperation of all opposition groups working against the regime of Saddam Hussein. It also reiterated its total faith in democracy and respect for human rights as the only solution to Iraq's chronic tragedies. Reviewing the catastrophic circumstances under which the Iraqis had been made to live over the past twenty years, the final statement blamed the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein and his reckless policies which had resulted in untold miseries and sufferings for Iraqis from all walks of life, regardless of their ethnic or religious origin.⁵¹⁷

The statement however singled out the Shi'as as being the main target of Saddam Hussein's wrath. A litany of crimes and atrocities against them was then recited with specific references to Saddam's crimes against "the holy shrines in Kerbala and Najaf". It also appealed to the international public opinion to press for the declaration of the area below 32nd parallel as a safe haven in the south and support any initiative

⁵¹⁷ Al-Bayan Al-Khitami Li-Ijtima' Al-Mu'aradha Al-Iraqia in Salah Al-Din and Shaqlawa (Final Communiqué of the Iraqi Opposition Meeting in Salah Al-Din and Shaqlawa 23rd-27th September 1992), *Al-Malaf Al-Iraqi*, October 1992, vol. 11, p. 1.

calling for protection of the peaceful Arab Shi'as in the central and southern parts of the country. The final statement further appealed to the UN Security Council not to lessen the ban imposed on the exports of Iraqi crude until and unless the regime of Saddam Hussein was in full compliance of UN Resolution 688, which among other things, demands that the Iraqi regime put an immediate end to the suppression of innocent civilians in Iraq. The statement further called upon the international organisation to allocate part of the frozen Iraqi funds to the humanitarian needs of the Iraqis in order to alleviate their suffering under embargo conditions.

The principle of Arab-Kurdish fraternity was then touched upon. The right to self-determination should be guaranteed to the Kurds within a unified, independent and free Iraq. References to the Turkomans and Assyrians were made within the context of respect for all social, religious and ethnic groups whose equality should be protected in a new fair-principled constitution. The elections in Kurdistan were hailed as a harbinger of freedom and democracy in the new Iraq. The statements ends with an appeal to "members of the ruling party" in which they were enjoined to come back to the people's fold. All Iraqis "will embrace you with open arms, once you decide to join the march for freedom".⁵¹⁸

Salah Al-Din Conference

A month after the preparatory meetings in Shaqlawa, 234 delegates representing almost all shades of the political spectrum in Iraq descended upon the Kurdish resort town of Salah Al-Din, meeting, for the first time, on Iraqi soil. Among the significant recommendations of the conference was the call upon the international community to

“develop the southern no-fly zone into a safe haven” to protect the Shi’as in the south. Rejecting accusations that the opposition was carrying out a partition agenda, the conferees stressed their support for the right to self-determination for the Kurds within the context of one indivisible Iraq. The conference also stressed its gratitude to the regional powers for supporting the Iraqi “patriotic movement”. Specific references were made to Syria, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The National Assembly membership was expanded to include all those who attended the conference who numbered 234. Ex-General Aref Abul Razaq, who had participated in five coups between 1958 and 1968 was named its Speaker. A presidential council was also created. This was made up of Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun, a senior Shi’a scholar, Masoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), and the Sunni ex-General Hasn Naqib, who had been living in exile since 1970 when he fell victim to one of the earliest purges of the armed forces.⁵¹⁹ A twenty-six man “Executive Council” headed by no other than Ahmad Chalabi was also created. Its members were:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Ayad Allawi | Shi’a (National Accord) |
| 2. Abdul Sattar Al-Duri | Sunni (Ex-Ba’thist) |
| 3. Talib Shibib | Shi’a (Ex-Ba’thist) |
| 4. Hani Al-Fikaiki | Shi’a (Ex-Ba’thist) |
| 5. Aziz Alyan | Shi’a (Democrat) |

⁵¹⁸“Final Communiqué”, *Al-Malaf Al-Iraqi*, p. 3.

⁵¹⁹This is council was, according to Ahmed Chalabi, modelled on the three-man Council of Presidency which acted as head of state throughout the Qassim regime. Like Qassim’s “Council of Presidency”, the newly created council included a Shi’a, a Kurd and a Sunni. Interview with Ahmed Chalabi in London on 2nd September 1999.

6. HiShi'ar Zibari	Kurd (KDP) ⁵²⁰
7. Sami Al-Askari	Shi'a (Da'wah)
8. Muhsin Dazaee	Kurd (KDP)
9. Ahmad Chalabi	Shi'a (Ind.) Chairman
10. Kemal Fuad	Kurd (PUK)
11. Mudhaffar Arsalan	Turkoman (NTP)
12. Bayan Jabr	Shi'a (SCIRI)
13. Sami Azara	Shi'a (Reform Movement)
14. Albert Yelda	Assyrian (ADP)
15. Latif Rashid	Kurd (PUK)
16. Ali Abdul Aziz	Kurd (IMK)
17. Humam Hammoudi	Shi'a (SCIRI)
18. Izzat Shabander	Shi'a (JIM)
19. Jassim Hussein	Shi'a (Da'wah)
20. Sami Abdul Rahman	Kurd (KDP)
21. Muhammad Abdul Jabbar	Shi'a (Da'wah Cadres)
22. Muhammad Muhammad Ali	Shi'a (Independent Islamist)
23. Falih Al-Samarra'ee	Sunni (Iraqi Islamic Party)
24. Abdul Hussein Shaban	Shi'a (Ind.)
25. Abdul Razzaq Al-Safi	Shi'a (Communist Party)
26. Nizar Haidar	Shi'a (IAO)

⁵²⁰ADP Assyrian Democratic Party
IAO Islamic Action Organisation
IMK Islamic Movement in Kurdistan
Ind Independent
JIM Jund Al-Imam Movement
KDP Kurdish Democratic Party
PUK Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
NTP National Turkoman Party
SCIRI Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq

To carry out the policies of the INC, a number of specialised Committees were created. These included: Relief Works, Economic, Information and Operational Resistance. The Relief Works Committee which was headed by Ali Tahsin Husseini. The Committee was primarily concerned with coordinating international relief activities throughout Iraq. The Economic Committee issued a blue print of its vision of post-Saddam Hussein Iraq in which it saw no other alternative to free enterprise as the solution to Iraq's down-trodden economy. The 23-member Information Committee was headed by Muhammad Abdul-Jabbar. Among its recommendation was the creation of a number of Information Bureaus in some regional and international capitals and the enhancement of contact between INC and world media as this might give Iraqi opposition much needed exposure.

The Operational Resistance Committee, which included a number of Iraqi officers who had defected to the opposition camp at different times was entrusted with the task of soliciting military assistance from friendly and neighbourly states in the region. The Committee recommended that better use of the Iraqi military living in exile be made. One of its recommendations called upon the Gulf War international coalition to return seized Iraqi arms and equipment to the INC. The Committee also appealed to the United Nations to release some of the frozen Iraqi funds so as to enable INC to purchase much needed arms and munitions.⁵²¹

The final communiqué of the conference contained the now familiar condemnation of the repressive policies of the regime of Saddam Hussein and the necessity of working collectively towards the noble objective of toppling the Baghdad regime and the

⁵²¹Interview with Resistance Committee member General T. Al-Yassiri in London, Oct. 12th 1999.

establishment of free and democratic rule in Iraq. Specific reference was made to the “Shi’a Arab majority” who were especially targeted by the regime of Saddam Hussein. The communiqué further stressed the need for recognising the Kurds’ right to self-determination, considering federalism as a base for future relations between Arabs and Kurds in Iraq.

Unlike the Vienna conference which was widely boycotted by all non-Kurdish parties, the Salah Al-Din gathering drew less criticism from the Iraqi opposition parties. Many of the parties which had sent delegates to Salah Al-Din voiced serious objections to the way in which the conference was administered or to the final communiqué, or to this aspect or that of the conference. Those who boycotted Salah Al-Din included:

1. Arab Bath Socialist Party - Iraqi Command (based in Damascus)
2. Iraqi Socialist Party (based in Damascus)
3. Iraqi Socialist Movement (based in Damascus)
4. Nasserite Unionist Assembly (based in Damascus)
5. National Reconciliation Group (based in Damascus)
6. Independent League (based in Damascus)
7. Democratic Accord Assembly (based in London)
8. Iraqi Democratic Assembly (based in London)
9. Free Iraqi Council (based in London)
10. National Democratic Islamic Assembly (based in Damascus)
11. Imam Al-Khalisi’s Office (based in Damascus)

The objections raised against Salah Al-Din were many and varied. Above all, the Arab nationalists saw in the proposed federalism for the Kurds a partition plan aimed at serving U.S. interests in the region. This objection received the blessings of Iran, Turkey and Syria as these three countries had sizeable Kurdish minorities and did not wish to be "contaminated by the virus of federalism".⁵²² Hardly a month had passed after the Salah Al-Din conference when the foreign ministers of the three countries met in Ankara to voice objection to the federal plan.⁵²³

Most parties also targeted procedural matters and criticised the organisers' lack of transparency. Among other things, the organizers were accused of being ill-prepared on many counts and of resorting to undemocratic ways in drawing up the list of delegates. No agenda had been prepared and most of those who attended the conference did not know each other. The old objections to the quota allotted to prospective participants were also raised. Behind the scenes U. S. involvement was also a major source of criticism.⁵²⁴

The Islamic Movement in Iraq, headed by Jawad Al-Khalisi, a member of a highly influential religious family in Kadhimiya, Baghdad, who is known for his encouragement of closer Sunnis-Shi'a cooperation, issued from his exile in Damascus a statement accusing those who went to Salah Al-Din of being puppets in the hands of the Americans. Its statement, which was entitled "About the Meetings Under the American Umbrella in Salah Al-Din", is indicative of the attitude of this Shi'a cleric whose family had actively worked against British interests in Iraq during the early

⁵²² Abdul Hussein Shaban, *Asifa Ala Bilad Al-Shams (A Storm Across the Land of the Sun)* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kunouz Al-Adabiya, 1994), p. 221.

⁵²³ Shaban, *Storm*, p. 221.

stages of national rule.⁵²⁵ *Al-Tajamu' Al-Dimocrati Al-Iraqi* (Iraqi Democrats Assembly) condemned the Salah Al-Din conference and deplored the press reports which had alleged that the Democrats had participated in the conference. Vigorously denying such an "unfounded lie", the unnamed spokesman for the Democrats called upon all other "opposition forces to reconsider their erroneous positions before it is too late".⁵²⁶ Some Arab nationalists who had attended the Shaqlawa meetings boycotted the Salah Al-Din conference. These include Mahdi Al-Obaidi and Mubdir Al-Wayyis and a number of Arab nationalists, ex-Ba'thists and independents who were mainly based in Damascus and operated under Syrian wings.

When Syria realised that Salah Al-Din would be an extension of Vienna and that the United States was involved in the preparation and organisation of that gathering, it asked its proteges to fold camp and return to Damascus. In the Syrian capital, an urgent call was made for a conference embracing all Arab nationalists to be held in Damascus on 14th-15th October. The statement issued at the conclusion of the two-days meetings contains no criticism of the Salah Al-Din conference to which, indeed, they made no reference. It did however announce the formation of a Coordination Committee for Nationalist Action. The Committee included some well known nationalists who had served as cabinet members, senior diplomats as well as a number of high-ranking ex-military officers. Prominent among whom were:

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 1. Wa'il Al-Hilali | Arab Ba'th Socialist Party (Iraqi Command) |
| 2. Mahdi Al-Ubaidi | Arab Ba'th Socialist Party (Iraqi Command) |

⁵²⁴Interview with Salah Omar Al-Ali, leader of the National Democratic Accord Assembly in London on 20th November 1999.

⁵²⁵Communiqué Text published in *Al-Malaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 12, December 1992, p. 5.

⁵²⁶Text of Democrats' statement in *Al-Malaf Al-Iraqi*, p. 5.

3. Hamid Sultan	Arab Ba'th Socialist Party (Iraqi Command)
4. Fadhil Al-Ansari	Arab Ba'th Socialist Party (Iraqi Command)
5. Safa' Al-Falaki	Arab Ba'th Socialist Party (Iraqi Command)
6. Abdul Sattar Al-Douri	Arab Ba'th Socialist Party (Iraqi Command)
7. Adib Al-Jadir	Arab Nationalist
8. General Hasan Al-Naqib	Independent Iraqi Commission
9. Abdul-Ilah Al-Nasrawi	Arab Socialist movement
10. Sa'ad Al-Zubaidi	Free Unionist Officers Movement
11. Amir Ali	Action Today Movement
12. Muhsin Al-Uthari	Arab Nationalist
13. General Abdul Amir Al-Ubaisi	Arab Nationalist
14. Al-Sheikh Radhi Mahmud	Arab Ba'th Socialist Party (Iraq)
15. Mubdir Al-Wayyis	The Socialist Party of Iraq
16. Nouri Al-Bahrani	Nasserite Democratic Assembly
17. Mahmud Shamsa	Arab Nationalist. ⁵²⁷

The Coordination Committee, however, was still-born. Apart from launching a little-read weekly bulletin called *Al-Watan*, which continued to be published in Damascus until late 1999, the Committee has had no other political activity. The representatives of Saad Salih Jabr's Free Iraq Council, Shafeeq Qazzaz and that of Salah Omar Al-Ali's National Democratic Accord Assembly, Rashid Al-Hadithi also withdrew from

the conference when they saw a "second Vienna" in Salah Al-Din. They strongly objected to the tendency to adopt federalism as a solution to the Kurdish question.

Despite these withdrawals and condemnations, the Salah Al-Din conference remains a significant landmark in the development of Iraqi opposition to the regime of Saddam Hussein. It was the first important gathering which succeeded in bringing together the established as well as the new political parties, individuals as well as groups. The strategy adopted by the Salah Al-Din conference provoked the regional powers and raised serious suspicions about the orientation of its organisers. The direct involvement of the United States in Iraqi opposition, which was clearly indicated in the open support of American officials⁵²⁸ as well as in statements by the chief spokesman of the Iraqi opposition leaders⁵²⁹ made regional powers fear that the American project, which, among other things, adopted federalism with the Kurds and the imposition of safe havens in the Kurdish and Shi'a parts of Iraq, aimed at partitioning Iraq along sectarian and ethnic lines. The formation of a three-man Presidential Council made up, as it was of a Sunni, a Shi'a and a Kurd made the Salah Al-Din conference smack of sectarianism. This orientation was rejected by all regional powers which also feared that the INC came to supplant the JAC, which had been operating under the patronage of these regional states.

⁵²⁷"Bayan Sadir Un Igtima' Mumathilin Un Al-Qiwa Al-Qawmiya Al-Arabiya Fi Al-Iraq" (Statement by Representatives of Arab Nationalist Powers in Iraq), *Al-Malah Al-Iraqi*, vol. 12, November 1992, p. 4.

⁵²⁸The then Secretary of State, James Baker met with a delegation from the INC headed by Masoud Barazani, Ahmed Chalabi and Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun immediately after the Vienna conference. The gesture was intended as recognition of the legitimacy of INC and also as an indication of approval and support. See *Al-Safir* newspaper, 22nd July 1992, p. 3.

⁵²⁹In an interview with *Al-Hayat* newspaper, Chalabi justifies involving the U.S. in supporting INC by stressing that "dealing with the great powers, particularly the United States of America has become inevitable, especially as the ruinous adventures had made Washington an essential party in the Iraqi... question", *Al-Hayat*, 10th July, 1995, p. 4.

The Salah Al-Din Conference: An Assessment

The year 1992 witnessed intensive attempts at creating an organisational structure to lead Iraqi opposition. During the second half of the year, two important gatherings were organised: the first was held in Vienna in June; the second on Iraqi soil, Salah Al-Din in September. These two conferences were held against a negative background which had been brought about by a number of factors. Especially significant were the activities and practices of the new opposition, which came into being after the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. In order that the period in question may properly be assessed, a number of points must be emphasized:

Leadership vacuum

Unlike the Iranian experience, which had produced a unified opposition leadership embodied in Khomeini who coordinated domestic and exile opposition efforts to topple the regime of the Shah of Iran, the Iraqi opposition experience did not have a unified command or an individual with enough popularity, charisma or gravitas to lead or guide the opposition to shake the regime and oust Saddam Hussein. Two whole years of consultations, deliberations and meetings failed to produce a leadership with enough legitimacy and authority which qualified it to fill the vacuum.

Rifts and Internal Squabbles

Although the Iraqi opposition was by no means a model of unity and solidarity before the invasion of Kuwait, the period which followed the invasion witnessed unprecedented intense inner rebellions and plots, which showed that each group had placed its own agenda and sectarian, nationalist or regional interests above the higher Iraqi national interests. In theory, the two conferences therefore aimed at finding

common ground on which a minimum agreement between the conflicting parties could be reached.

International and Regional Support

The two conferences sought to gain international recognition for the opposition movement and to steer it away from the conflicting interests of regional powers. The experience of the two years following the Gulf War showed that the opposition was seeking regional or international recognition in the form of political and material support from neighbouring countries such as Syria, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia or from Western powers especially from the United States. The desire to project an image of independence was reflected in the choice of Vienna and Salah Al-Din as venues for the two conferences. The organisers of the two gatherings had hoped that geographical neutrality of the conference would reflect the free will and political independence of the opposition.

Loss of Faith

The two conferences were held against a background of widespread disappointment and despondence that no single political party and perhaps even the whole opposition, which claim to have a large following inside Iraq, could topple or even shake the regime of Saddam Hussein. Despite the painful blows meted out to the regime during the Gulf War and after, the opposition had practically done nothing to indicate that it could threaten the central government authority or influence the man in the street. No exile political organisation succeeded in exploiting the weaknesses of the regime during the Gulf War and in the period immediately after. This failure deprived all opposition parties of the opportunity to prove their legitimacy and credibility within the framework of the opposition itself and before the Iraqi people.

Chapter 6: Iraqi Opposition from the Salah Al-Din Conference to Saddam

Hussein's Invasion of Arbil

This chapter continues the discussion of post-Gulf War Iraqi opposition and concentrates on the successes and failures of the Iraqi National Congress (INC) in the effort to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein during the period following the Salah Al-Din Conference of October 1992 to August 1996, when Saddam Hussein's troops stormed Arbil, the regional capital of Kurdistan. Attention will be paid to the INC's successes and failures, its impact on the Iraqi scene and the public as well as public perceptions of this organization. The activities of the INC on the diplomatic and military fronts will be dealt with in some detail. Attention will also be given to INC's links with the outside world, especially with the United States, its main international backer. It is hoped that some light will be thrown on INC's perceived ties with the Central Intelligence Agency and on the impact of this perception on the INC as a whole and its Executive Council President, Ahmad Chalabi in particular.

This chapter will also discuss the highly controversial question of INC funding, the wide divergence of views within the INC as well as the way in which the INC was run. The impact of Chalabi's highly centralized management, secrecy and recklessness on the mass defections of a number of political groups will also be analyzed. The chapter also touches upon the non-INC members, especially the Constitutional Monarchy movement, which was launched on 20th June 1993. It ends with an assessment of the performance of the INC on the national and international scene, where the role of the Shi'a Islamic groupings will be discussed. Special emphasis will be given to the impact of INC-Kurdish relations on the struggle against the regime of President Saddam Hussein.

Since its birth in Salah Al-Din, the INC attempted to establish itself as the main coordinating body for the Iraqi opposition. Given the history of the Iraqi opposition movement, such a task was immensely difficult to achieve. Small wonder then that the Iraqis (in general, and the old opposition parties in particular) coolly received the INC and viewed its creation with skepticism and doubt. However, desperate to get rid of the Baghdad regime and willing to stand behind any attempt which might help achieve that objective, many political groups and prominent dissidents cast aside⁵³⁰ their suspicions and responded favourably to the initiative of Ahmad Chalabi, the Iraqi financier who had been little known heretofore, despite his reputable and highly respectable family name. Many of those who attended the constituent conference in the Austrian capital had never met the man or known anything about his political background or history, except two things: first, Chalabi was a descendant of one of the wealthiest Baghdadi families and, second, he was involved in the much publicized scandal of the Jordan-based Petra Bank. Despite all that, they were willing to give the newly created body a chance.⁵³¹ It was against this background that Chalabi sought to win the confidence and trust of the leaders of the long-established opposition parties. One of the earliest steps, which throws a positive light on the INC, was its decision to base its headquarters on Iraqi soil. This move, at least for a time, enhanced INC's credibility, not only among the Iraqis who came to view all foreign-based opposition groups as ineffective operators and lackeys, but also in international circles, which soon became more open to contacts with INC.⁵³² From its base in the mountains of

⁵³⁰Rand Rahim Francke, "The Opposition", *Iraq Since the Gulf War: Prospects for Democracy*, ed, Fran Hazelton (London: Zed Books, 1994), 2nd ed., p. 171.

⁵³¹Interview with Salah Omar Al-Ali, leader of the National Democratic Accord Assembly in London on 26th January 2000.

⁵³²Sarah Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam: The Politics of Intervention in Iraq* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), p. 64.

Salah Al-Din in Kurdish northern Iraq, the new energized INC, aided by generous political and diplomatic U.S. support, soon embarked upon an ambitious but arduous project of gaining international recognition as the legitimate representative of Iraqi opposition.

The much publicized inauguration of INC headquarters in Salah Al-Din, which sits high on the edge of the dramatically beautiful Zagros mountain, was a highly festive event. For the INC "had taken over an entire hotel, decorating it with lurid posters depicting the imminent defeat of Saddam"⁵³³ and invited dozens of supporters and well wishers representing a wide range of political schools of thought. The newcomers came fully equipped with technical staff who occupied many buildings: one to run INC's radio and TV services and one that produced its newspaper. "It was like a mini-state, fondly recalls one INC activist of those days".⁵³⁴

The move to Salah-Al-Din was welcomed not only by Iraqis in general but by most international circles, which had not forgotten Saddam Hussein's invasion of his "sisterly neighbour". It was especially hailed by the U. S. and Britain, which saw the move as creating a further opportunity for applying pressure on Saddam. To that end, Washington, which was practically behind its creation, did not begrudge the INC any necessary funds to help it function efficiently. Through the CIA, it began to channel funds to the INC to enable it to carry out its propaganda war against the Baghdad

⁵³³ Andrew Cockburn and Patrick Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), p. 173.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

regime, attract new recruits and meet the costly expenses of the travel and conferences.⁵³⁵

INC Conferences

The February 1993 Conference

On 16th-21st February 1993, the INC Executive Council held its first meeting since the October consultative meeting. This event, which turned out to be the most important of the INC regular gatherings in Salah Al-Din, was also attended by the three-man Presidential Council. Reiterating their resolve to continue the struggle against the regime of Saddam Hussein, the participants then formed a number of specialized Committees in order to follow up and report on the specific tasks assigned to them. Below is a table showing the names of the Committee heads and their political affiliation:

External Relations	Hoshiar Zibari	KDP
Relief Works	Bayan Jabr	SCIRI
Constitutional and Legal	Sami Azara Al-Majoun	National Reform
Domestic Relations	Muhammad M. Ali	Independent Islamist
Arab and Islamic Relations	Ayad Allawi	Iraqi National Accord
Financial	Kemal Fuad	PUK
Research and Studies	Abdul-Razzaq Al-Safi	Iraqi Communist Party
Economic	Mudgaffar arsalan	Turkoman
Information	Muhammad Abdul-Jabbar	<i>Da'wah</i> Party

⁵³⁵Sarah Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam: The Politics of Intervention in Iraq* (London: I. B.

It was further agreed that Salah Al-Sheikhli, of the *Wifaq* (National Accord) group, act as official spokesman for the INC Executive Council.

Another offshoot of the conference was the 25-member "Constitutional Council" which was formed to help the INC Executive Council carry out its policies. Eight members of the newly created body were initially named by the Executive Council. These were:

Salah Al-Shaikhli	Iraqi National Accord
Ibrahim Al-Jaafari	Da'wah Party
Mihammad Al-Haidari	SCIRI
Labid Allawi	Iraqi Communist Party
Mustafa Jamal Al-Din	Independent Islamist
Muwaffaq Fattuhi	Iraqi Democratic Union
Falak Al-Din Kaka'ee	KDP
Dara Sheikh Tawfeewq	PUK ⁵³⁶

The August 1993 Conference

The third conference, which was attended by members of the INC Executive and Presidential Councils, took place in Salah Al-Din in the summer of 1993. Over a period of two weeks (July 21st – August 2nd), the participants had ample time to discuss the performance of the INC during the previous six months and to respond to

Tauris, 1999), p. 116.

the numerous challenges, both on political and humanitarian levels, which were confronting the Iraqi people in general, and the popular opposition inside the country in particular. The impact of the UN embargo on Iraq took up much of the long Conference agenda. Other matters discussed included the outcome of foreign tours made by INC members to a number of regional and European states.

While no call for the lifting of the embargo on Iraq was issued, a fact which was later to cause the INC much political trouble, the conference did however speak of "the untold miseries of the Iraqi people because of UN sanctions, which were hitting the masses quite hard". On the situation in the north, particularly along the Iranian-Kurdish border, which was witnessing a number of Iranian incursions into the Kurdish-controlled area, the INC took a somewhat mild stand. Instead of condemning it as an act of aggression against Iraq, it only referred to these military attacks, supposedly against Kurdish rebels based in Iraq, as "regrettable military operations in large areas in the provinces of Arbil and Suleimaniya". Mindful of the need to keep friendly relations with the outside world and in order to contain a volatile crisis, the INC soon decided to dispatch a delegation to the Islamic Republic of Iran to "encircle the problem in such a manner as to solidify the historical relations between the two countries and peoples and protect the sovereignty of the Iraqi Republic and safeguard the principles of good neighbourliness".⁵³⁷

⁵³⁶The remaining 17 were to be named at a later stage. Ex- Executive Council Secretary General Abdul Hussein Shaban points out that on account of differences as to who should be included, no agreement was reached and the whole idea was abandoned. Interview with Abdul Hussein Shaban in London on 5th January 2000.

⁵³⁷"Press Release on the Joint Session of INC Presidential and Executive Councils", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi (Iraqi File)*, 1993, vol. X, p. 18.

The political discourse of the INC was characterized by an emphasis on the necessity to rise above partisanship in the face of the common enemy. In order to continue efforts to establish itself as a credible authority, much of the conference time was devoted to the elusive question of opposition unity. While the idea of declaring a provisional government was briefly alluded to, its formation would have created deep rifts in the opposition. This became abundantly clear from the emphasis placed on the necessity to cooperate with all opposition parties, which were still operating independently outside the INC umbrella. This emphasis on unity however was, as it turned out, not genuine enough. It was, according to one significant participant, nothing but "a slogan for local and indeed international consumption".⁵³⁸

The February 1994 Conference

Unlike previous INC gatherings in Salah Al-Din, the third session took only five days, from 1st to 6th February 1994. Disappointed by the fact that the Saddam Hussein regime was attracting less and less attention and by the perception that the need to topple him was not high enough on the agendas of the Western powers, the INC turned to UN resolutions relevant to Iraq to enlist the support of the international community. Much attention was devoted to the discussion of Resolution 688, which, among other things, demanded an end to the repressive policies of the regime. The final statement of the conference sought to remind the outside world of its obligations not necessarily towards the suffering Iraqi people, but towards its own resolutions. It once again reiterated the INC's resolve to topple the dictatorial regime of Saddam

⁵³⁸Interview with Ex-Executive Council Secretary General Abdul Hussein Shaban in London on 5th January 2000.

Hussein and emphasized the need to develop good relations with neighbouring, Arab and Islamic states in such a manner as to strengthen the stand of Iraqi opposition.

Attempting to enhance its popularity among the Shi'a population of Iraq as well as the Shi'a opposition groups, the INC reiterated its determination to ensure that the no-fly-zone, imposed by UN Security Council Resolution 688 on 5th April 1990⁵³⁹, was extended in such a way as to include all Iraqi airspace. It, furthermore, pledged to continue its drive for the establishment of a safe haven in the Shi'a populated south of Iraq. The action plan promulgated by the INC called for "exploiting the regional and international sympathy for our people so as to enhance the potentials of our people to fight against dictatorship and establish the alternative government of its choice".⁵⁴⁰

This session coincided with an important tripartite meeting of the foreign ministers of Turkey, Iran and Syria in Ankara. While no details emerged from the ministerial meetings, the press release, issued at the conclusion of the Ankara gathering, pointed out that the three countries stressed the importance to regional and world peace of Iraq's territorial integrity. The INC welcomed the position adopted by the three countries and their call for the necessity to preserve Iraq's unity, although it saw in it a reiteration of the three countries' silent agreement on taking a firm stand against the realization of the Kurdish desire for independence. The INC statement dealt with this delicate question tactfully. It stressed the need "to see an end to the internal embargo imposed on the Kurdish region and the south" and indirectly criticized the three neighbours of Iraq for posing as guardians of Iraq's national unity. "We the Iraqis,

⁵³⁹Michael Gunter, *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political Analysis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 36.

⁵⁴⁰"INC Final Statement on the Joint Executive and Presidential Councils in Salah Al-Din of February 7th 1994", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 27, 1994, p. 15.

more than any other party, are more vigilant”, said the final statement.⁵⁴¹ It further stressed that the territorial unity of Iraq was in no danger of being breached or fractured, except by Saddam Hussein's regime itself.⁵⁴²

During this session, more new Committees were formed. These included: the International Affairs Committee, INC's Relations with Arab and Islamic States, Financial, Administrative and the 1994 Plan Committees.⁵⁴³

The June 1994 Conference

The next INC session was held on 21st June 1994. This session was characterized by the absence of many key figures in the Presidential and Executive Councils, who stayed away from Salah Al-Din, either because they had withdrawn from the INC or as a protest against what they perceived as the high-handed manner in which Chalabi dealt with the opposition delegates.⁵⁴⁴ Those who attended session were compelled to dub their gathering a “consultative” session. The participants were: Masoud Barzani, General Hassan Al-Naqib and INC Executive Council President Dr Ahmad Chalabi. The final statement also referred to the attendance of some members of the General Assembly as well as a few of the Consultative Constitutional Council.⁵⁴⁵

In the statement released at the conclusion of the session, the Kurdish question figured prominently. A call was issued to the international community to “remedy the

⁵⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵⁴³“Final statement of the INC Presidential and Executive Councils Joint session”, *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 12, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁴⁴Interview with Ex-INC Executive Council Secretary General, Abdul-Hussain Shaban in London on 5th January 2000. Shaban quotes ex-Presidential Council member Bahr Al-Uloun as saying; “When I come over to the INC headquarters in Salah Al-Din I feel totally isolated from the rest of the world and that everything was dependent on Chalabi who is in full control of the INC coffers. Chalabi was quite reluctant to invite INC executives to meet lest they criticize him or call for new elections”.

hardships experienced by the Kurdish people on account of the continued double-edged embargo imposed on the Kurdish region".⁵⁴⁶ The statement further stressed the need for the Kurdish movement to hold a national conference devoted to the settlement of the most pressing issues facing Kurdistan. It also included an endorsement of the "federal option" as the best solution to the Iraqi crisis.

It was clear from the final statement that the INC felt that the political wind was blowing against it. Profound concern was voiced over the "attempts made to end the isolation of the dictatorial regime by some states, which were only interested in making selfish and narrow-minded economic gains".⁵⁴⁷ The statement also included a rebuttal of the criticism directed against the INC, which had been accused, among other things, of inaction. It reiterated the importance of operations on the domestic front and expressed surprise at those who seek to belittle INC's achievements in this regard.⁵⁴⁸

INC's Media Activities

Broadcasting Corporation

The INC resorted to the media as a means to mobilize Iraqi and international opinion against the regime of Saddam Hussein, and to voice its own views on the situation in Iraq and also how best to tackle the question of effecting a long-overdue political

⁵⁴⁵"INC Statement Assessing Situation", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 31, 1994, p. 13.

⁵⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 13. INC Executive Council member Talib Shabeeb, points out that the embargo on the regime of Saddam Hussein was eroding adding that "Turkey and Russia are showing signs of tilting towards the Baghdad regime. Official and parliamentary delegations from France, Italy and Germany visited Iraq lately. On the other hand, the political stance of UN Security member states Spain and Brazil was vacillating". See Talib Shabeeb, "Al-Azma Al-Iraqiya wa Al-Bahth an Hal Al-Mughaier" (The Iraqi crisis and the search for an alternative), *Al-Hayat*, 18th June 1994, p. 6.

⁵⁴⁸INC Final Statement on the June 21st Session", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 31, 1994, p. 13.

change in Baghdad. Although characterized by adopting partisan positions and all that is related to the Iraqi question, the Broadcasting Corporation (*Haiy'at Al-Irsal*) did make an attempt, on occasion, to present objective news and analysis.⁵⁴⁹

This brainchild of the Baghdadi maverick banker, which was based in Iraqi Kurdistan, was owned and supervised directly by INC President Ahmad Chalabi, not the INC as an organization.⁵⁵⁰ Officially, the Broadcasting Corporation falls within the domain supervised by the "Media Committee" chaired by Muhammad Abdul-Jabbar, who candidly admitted, "this Committee was absolutely powerless".⁵⁵¹ But this was hardly a secret. Almost all INC members knew at the time that the Broadcasting Corporation was in fact a tool in the hands of Ahmad Chalabi who intended to use it in order to raise his own profile within the Iraqi community and to serve as a personal propaganda machine. Chalabi's propaganda strategy magnified and exaggerated INC's achievements and sought to present the united front of the Iraqi opposition under the INC banner. But he also attempted marginalise and belittle the part played by rival or opposition groups outside the INC. While it may have enhanced INC's reputation in the outside world, this opportunistic and propagandistic attitude was one of the factors which pushed numerous opposition figures and groups to quit cooperation with the INC, leading some to take hostile stands not only against it but also against its main backer, the United States.⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁹Interview with ex-Media Committee chairman Muhammad Abdul Jabbar in London on 4th October 1999.

⁵⁵⁰Interview with Nabil Al-Musawi in London on 15th February 2000. According to Al-Musawi, the Broadcasting Corporation was the conduit through which U. S. funds were dispatched to the INC.

⁵⁵¹Interview with Muhammad Abdul-Jabbar in London on 4th October 1999.

⁵⁵²*Ibid.*

The Broadcasting Corporation transmitted news and comments over the radio for most of the evening (Baghdad time) at a rate of seven hours a day. Its reach extended to the whole Kurdish region, Baghdad and many parts of Western, central and southWestern provinces including the regions of Kerbala, Babil, Najaf, Wasit and Anbar. The INC also had a TV station, which transmitted documentary programmes, news and analyses for an equal period of time each day. The INC TV channel's footprint however was limited to the Kurdish region and neighbouring areas.⁵⁵³

As far as print journalism was concerned, the INC published a weekly bulletin, which appeared simultaneously in two editions: the London edition and that of the northern region of Iraq. The Corporation's London Office housed the Press Bureau which supplied Western media, political, diplomatic and intelligence circles with INC progress reports, updates and press releases.

INC's Official Organ :Al-Mutamar (The Congress):

Besides the Broadcasting Corporation, Ahmad Chalabi and Salah Al-Sheikhli started *Al-Mu'tamar* (The Congress), which was the official organ of the INC. This Arabic language newspaper was at first edited and distributed from London. But, quite rightly, Chalabi saw that Arabic language newspapers, distributed to Opposition exiles outside Iraq, would have no effect as far as INC's major aim, the replacement of the Saddam regime, was concerned. The head office of *Al-Muatamar* was therefore moved to northern Iraq, where it is still edited. From its headquarters in Salah-Al-Din, the INC began to publish *Al-Mu'tamar* in full, with a special abridged edition

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*

distributed outside Iraq.⁵⁵⁴ No figures are available as to the volume of its circulation. It is thought however that it was not widely circulated within Iraq itself, as the "crime of criticizing the head of state", according to a 1989 law issued by the Revolution Command Council, Iraq's highest ruling body was "punishable by death".⁵⁵⁵

INC's Military Wing

In attempting to effect political change in Iraq through military action, the INC did not have any specific plan or even a clear idea of how to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein. Within the INC, opinions as to what to do varied widely. There were those who called for the ousting of Saddam's regime through a coup. Others preferred an Iranian-style popular uprising, while still others preached Afghan-style guerrilla warfare. Then there were those who envisioned the end of Saddam Hussein's regime as a natural result of an alliance between armed marsh dwellers in the south, on the one hand, and northern-based INC and Kurdish forces, on the other.⁵⁵⁶

It was against this background that the military wing of the INC was created. Estimates as to the number of those who came to carry arms under the INC banner have not been confirmed. However, General Wafiq Al-Samarraee, who was to command the failed INC military project against Saddam Hussein in March 1995, stresses that it was made up of more than 500 men. This number however does not include the Kurdish "Pesh Mergha" (troops) who were drawn from the two main Kurdish parties, the PUK and the KDP.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁴Interview with Salah Al-Shaikhli in London on 8th February 2000

⁵⁵⁵Interview with General Wafiq Al-Samarraee in London on 1st March 2000

⁵⁵⁶Interview with General Tawfeeq Al-Yassiri in London on 14th February 2000.

⁵⁵⁷Interview with General Wafiq Al-Samarraee in London on 1st March 2000.

The INC troops were mainly defectors and deserters between 18 and 40 years old. In addition to being trained in the use of light and medium weapons, they also received political instruction on the "abuses of Saddam" and the "meaning of democracy".

Unmarried cadets were paid 1, 000 Iraqi dinars, which was approximately two and a half times as much as Kurdish civil servants received. Food and medical services were provided without charge and a hospital had been set up in Shaqlawah. Given these benefits and financial woes of Saddam, many had been attracted for economic reasons. Others joined for ideological ones.⁵⁵⁸

In establishing a military wing within the INC, Ahmad Chalabi was not only trying to provide "teeth" for the INC and help it persuade the U.S. administration to allocate financial help to the Iraqi opposition, but also seeking through this stratagem to consolidate his own hegemony over the INC.⁵⁵⁹ Washington however was not fully convinced of the feasibility of Chalabi's military project. However, Chalabi's enthusiasm may be explained by his belief that the only way to undermine Saddam was from below, by "sapping the dictator's power from a base in liberated Kurdistan" through such means as propaganda and the "encouragement of defections by officials of the regime and desertions among the army".⁵⁶⁰ But the American administration had a different idea:

In November 1993, he [Chalabi] flew to Washington to unveil an ambitious plan to foment mutinies in army units around Iraq, which would eventually spread to Baghdad and topple Saddam. Addressing officials from the CIA, the State department, and the Pentagon..., he gave precise details of

⁵⁵⁸Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political Analysis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 42-3.

⁵⁵⁹Interview with General Wafiq Al-Samarrae in London on 1st March 2000.

⁵⁶⁰Andrew and Patrick Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes: The resurrection of Saddam Hussein* (New York, Harper Collins, 1999), pp. 166.

the adventurous scheme and outlined the support he would need from the United States to carry it out. Then he flew home and waited for a response. There was none.⁵⁶¹

INC Foreign Tours

Soon after its creation, the INC started to dispatch envoys to many parts of the world including the United States, Europe and Arab states. It also sent delegations to United Nations sessions to lobby on specific points. One of the earliest INC tours was to Holland where a delegation made up of a number of Executive Council members met the Dutch Foreign Minister.⁵⁶² The suffering of the Shi'a in the south of Iraq was discussed and according to the delegation head, the Dutch Foreign Minister, "expressed support for the idea of deploying international observers in the southern parts of Iraq where the people were subjected to the authorities' suppression".⁵⁶³

A few days later another INC delegation headed by SCIRI Political Advisor Homam Hamoudi visited the British Foreign Ministry, where he met Douglas Hurd and some MPs. The British Foreign Ministry condemned the evil practices of the Iraqi regime and "pledged to bring the question of southern Iraq to the attention of Prime Minister John Major".⁵⁶⁴

An indication of the warm reception accorded to the INC delegates is given by the fact that the Iraqi envoys were received by the highest statesmen of the countries visited. In the United States, for example, the INC delegation, which was made up of

⁵⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁵⁶²"Wafd Min Al-Muaradha Al-Iraqiya Yujri Muhadathat Fi Holanda" (Iraqi Opposition Delegation Hold Talks in Holland), *Al-Hayat*, May 5th 1993, p. 3.

⁵⁶³*Ibid.*

Executive Council member Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun, General Hasan Al-Naqib, KDP's leader Mas'oud Barzani, Jalal Talbani, PUK's leader met Vice-President Al Gore, Secretary of State Warren Christopher and other top officials including the National Security Advisor. According to INC accounts of the meetings, "all American officials stressed that there would be no dialogue, softening of attitude, normalization or any dealings of any sort with [Saddam Hussein]".⁵⁶⁵

INC's Visit to Kuwait: A Divisive Element

On 20th November 1993, an INC delegation made up of a number of INC's Executive Council members headed by Ahmad Chalabi, began an official week-long visit to Kuwait. The delegates were met by the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jabir Ahmad Al-Sabah, Crown Prince Sheikh Sa'd Al-Sabah, Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sabah Al-Jabir Al-Sabah as well as a number of MPs and policy makers. The delegates expressed full support of UN resolutions on Iraq and Kuwait and reiterated INC's respect for the sovereignty and independence of Kuwait as a member of the League of Arab States and the United Nations. The delegates also expressed their firm belief "that there would be no peace between Iraq and Kuwait as long as Saddam Hussein remained in power".⁵⁶⁶

The visit to Kuwait proved quite controversial. Even before it took place, it had triggered a violent wave of criticism. While no objection was raised to INC's intention of attempting to have access to Kuwaiti media in order to be better equipped to highlight INC's role and broadcast Iraqi opposition's stances on national

⁵⁶⁴"Hurd Yaltaqi Wafdan Min Al-Muaradha Al-Islamiya Al-Iraqi" (Hurd Meets Delegation Representing Iraqi Islamic Opposition), *Al-Hayat*, May 13th, p. 4.

⁵⁶⁵"INC: New U. S. Policy Assessed", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 17, 1993, p. 11.

and regional developments, many political groups and personalities resented INC's "intention of seeking to obtain \$500m in financial support" and INC's declared ratification of the newly established demarcation lines of the Iraqi-Kuwaiti borders which they felt had been forced upon defeated Iraq through UN Resolution 723. Saad Jabr's Free Iraqi Council, for one, issued on 14th November 1993 a press release in which he denounced INC's declared willingness to embrace the situation on the ground as "hasty and irresponsible", especially as neither the INC nor any opposition party had any "mandate from the Iraqi people to speak on its behalf on this highly delicate question which should be decided by a freely elected government in Iraq".⁵⁶⁷

The negative impact of the Kuwaiti visit cannot be exaggerated. A wide range of groupings and individuals representing all shades of the Iraqi political spectrum hastened to voice their condemnation and utter rejection of what proved a highly unpopular move. Among other things, the visit reminded many in Iraq of the now defunct bargain which had been struck in 1963 between a delegation representing the short-lived first Ba'thist regime in Iraq and the state of Kuwait.⁵⁶⁸

One of the strongest condemnations came from a group of 90 Iraqi dissidents comprised of academics, intellectuals, professionals, artists and journalists living in

⁵⁶⁶"Statement on INC's visit to Kuwait", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 24, 1993, p. 5.

⁵⁶⁷"*Al-Majlis Al-Iraqi Al-Hur Yentaqid Ziarat Wafd Al-Mu'tamar Lil-Kuwait*" The free Iraqi council Criticizes the INC's Visit to Kuwait", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 24, 1993, p. 5.

⁵⁶⁸It is now an open secret that Kuwait was a venue of "the more important meetings" between the Ba'th Party and representatives of CIA, which was widely seen as having put its weight behind the Ba'thists who sought to and eventually succeeded in toppling the regime of General Qassim. See Hana Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton U. P., 1978), p. 985.

exile, mainly in Europe. In their statement, the signatories accused the INC of seeking to profiteer at the expense of the Iraqi people:

The great powers have no right to chop off a part of Iraq and then re-demarcate the borders in order to serve their oil interests in the region and deprive Iraq access to the sea. The legal and proper way of tackling this question is through negotiations between two legitimate governments in Iraq and Kuwait. The outcome of such negotiations should then be ratified by a directly elected legislative council in Iraq and the Kuwaiti Parliament. If differences arise then the matter must be referred to the International court of Justice in the Hague. We therefore appeal to all Iraqis to abort these designs and undermine any scheme aimed at usurping Iraq's rights and sovereignty.⁵⁶⁹

Another angry reaction came from the Islamic Movement in Iraq. The movement's London Office issued a statement containing a scathing attack on the INC, accusing it of playing with fire. It reminded those involved in negotiations with the Kuwaitis that neither they nor any party other than a democratically elected government had the right to decide such a "question of destiny". It also rejected INC's claim that it embodied the hopes and aspirations of all Iraqis, stressing that the Iraqis will never abide by any agreements which may have been reached.⁵⁷⁰

An indication of the immense suspicion with which many Iraqis viewed the Kuwait visit may be seen in the fact that even INC Secretary General, Abdul-Hussein Shaban criticized, albeit indirectly, the attempts made by INC to use the question of

⁵⁶⁹ "Bayan Sadir an Majmoua Iraqiya Mu'aridha Li-Qarar Tarsim Al-Hudud Bain Al-Iraq Wa Al-Kuwait" (An Appeal by an Iraqi Group Opposed to the Re-Demarcation of Borders Between Iraq and Kuwait), *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, November 1993, vol. 23, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁷⁰ Press Release dated 18th November 1993, signed by Muhammad Jawad Al-Kadhimi and Muhammad Mahdi Al-Khalisi for the *Al-Tajammu' Al-Islami Al-Watani Al-Dimocrati* (Democratic Patriotic Islamic assembly) and Abul Amir Alwan for Iraqi Islamic Party.

Iraqi-Kuwaiti border demarcations as a means to extract maximum financial profit. In response to a question put to him by the editor of *Sawt Al-Iraq* (Voice of Iraq), organ of Da'wah Party, about INC's policies, Shaban stressed that "there were some [within INC] who lean towards accepting the [UN] demarcation resolutions in return for money, a 'handful of silver' and some media and political support. He also indicated that the border issue was "too important and sensitive an issue" to be dealt with by the opposition, especially as the two sides, Kuwait and the INC are not equal.⁵⁷¹

It became quite clear from the outset that the INC foreign tours were planned and organised by INC Executive Council president Ahmad Chalabi "who did not even take the trouble to inform the chairman of the External Relations Committee".⁵⁷² Furthermore, the process of selecting the INC emissaries was monopolized by Chalabi. What angered many even inside the INC was the fact that preparations for foreign tours were made solely through Chalabi's own office which paid for all expenses incurred by these foreign tours.⁵⁷³ These early signs of Chalabi's personal hegemony came to alienate many of the opposition groups, which later felt compelled to sever relations with the INC.

Despite the validity of much of this criticism, the fact remains that the energetic Chalabi felt that the INC envoys were either too slow to act or lacked enthusiasm for

⁵⁷¹ "Hiwar Maa Al-Diktawr Abdul Hussein Shaban Amin Srr Al-Majlis Al-Tanfithi Lil- Mutamar Al-Watani Al-Iraqi" (Interview with Dr Abdul Hussein Shaban, Secretary General of INC Executive Council), *Sawt Al-Iraq*, 1st December 1993, pp. 1-4.

⁵⁷² Interview with INC External Relations chairman, Hoshiar Zibari in London on 15th January 2000.

⁵⁷³ Interview with INC Presidential Council member, Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun in London on 5th September 1999.

the INC cause, preferring to advance their own partisan arguments abroad.⁵⁷⁴ When the INC had to choose representatives to Europe, Chalabi asserts that “Hoshyar Zibari, who was officially responsible for relations with Europe, refused to go, and had to be replaced by Nabil Musawi”.⁵⁷⁵ Blaming others for the malfunction of the INC, Chalabi further points out that:

Ayad Allawi who had been nominated as officially responsible for INC relations with Arab and Islamic countries, decided not to participate in the INC visit to Saudi Arabia, and was very busy travelling elsewhere and working on *Wifaq* (INC) business. Salah Al-Shaikhli found it difficult to act as coordinating spokesman for the INC since other INC members would make separate statements to the media. Furthermore Ayad Allawi made it plain on several occasions that there should be an inner caucus of the effective movements within the INC who should manage INC affairs.⁵⁷⁶

INC Finances

The question of INC finances was, from the start, viewed with suspicion by large segments of Iraqi opposition parties, including some operating under INC's own umbrella. Speculations and generally circulated stories about U. S. funding of the INC were rife from the day the INC was established. The INC however is partly to blame for this highly damaging reputation which made it look like it was nothing but

⁵⁷⁴When Sheikh Sami Al-Maajoun was slow in getting down to work on the Constitution, Ahmad Chalabi had written, speedily and efficiently, by lawyers whom he employed. Interview with INC Presidential Council member, Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun in London on 5th September 1999.

⁵⁷⁵Interview with INC Executive Council President Ahmad Chalabi in London on 11th September 1999.

⁵⁷⁶*Ibid.* “Ideally”, Chalabi quotes Allawi as having suggested that “the proposed caucus should include: Ahmad Chalabi, Wifaq, KDP, PDK and SCIRI”.

"a creature of the West and as a front which the West supported only because it suited Western designs for Iraq".⁵⁷⁷

To make matters worse, the INC was, in its publications and media interviews making much of the impact U.S. financial aid had on expelling the Soviets from Afghanistan. Furthermore, the INC did not hide its intention of seeking foreign aid from whichever quarter it came. In September 1993, *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi* published the minutes of the INC Executive council in which its members spent much of the session, which had originally been devoted to the discussion and appraisal of INC's visit to Washington, on how best to approach Kuwait and obtain half a billion U. S. dollars in return for endorsing the new demarcation lines along the Iraqi-Kuwaiti borders.⁵⁷⁸ Even the Iraqi Communists, traditionally the most vigorous opponents and bitter enemies of the Gulf States were enthusiastic about the visit. Their representative at INC, Amir Abdullah, longtime Secretary General of the Communist Party, continued to push for obtaining the \$500m as a loan to "be debited to the future government of Iraq".⁵⁷⁹

Up until now, details of who was financing the INC have until now been puzzling and murky. Rumours and accusations of corruption and profiteering multiplied when the

⁵⁷⁷Anthony H Cordesman and Ahmed S. Hashim, *Iraq: Sanctions and Beyond* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), p. 65. David Wurmser stresses the fact that some members of the CIA and the Clinton administration "had envisioned the INC as a public relations tool to weaken and distract the regime; they had never intended it to create a real insurgency or to perform in the main theatre of operations in the plan to get rid of Saddam. Some feared that if the rebellion went awry it could embroil the United States directly; others held that it could lead to the dissolution of Iraq, or to a broad-based revolution and consequently anarchy, if it succeeded. At any rate, all agreed that the INC's activity threatened the Sunni core of the current regime in Baghdad, from which they hoped a coup would still come". See David Wurmser, *Tyranny's Ally: America's Failure to Defeat Saddam Hussein* (Washington, D. C: The American Enterprise Institute Press, 1999), p. 15.

⁵⁷⁸"Minutes of INC Executive Council Session 17th-19th May 1993", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 21, 1993, pp. 15-17.

⁵⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p. 16.

three members of the tripartite Presidential Council, the INC's highest policy-making body said on separate occasions that they did not know where the funds came from and that such a "question is for [Chalabi]. He has the details".⁵⁸⁰ Following a most important meeting in the American capital with the then Secretary of State Christopher Warren and Vice President Al Gore in the spring of 1993, Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun, one of the three members of the INC's presidential council, added to these uncertainties when he declared:

Neither I nor any member of the INC leadership has any knowledge of any U. S. funds paid to the INC to this day. He then claimed, however, that the United States had already matched the \$50 million contributed by some Arab states and some Iraqi financiers. The perceived need for secrecy and Al-Uloun's inexperience in dealing with covert U. S. support probably explain his incoherence on this matter. Further remarks by Al-Uloun indicated that before the spring of 1993, certain Iraqis in opposition to Saddam had squandered more than \$40 million given them by the United States.⁵⁸¹

The situation was not helped when a leading American newspaper stressed on 12th April 1995 that the CIA had been involved in covert activities aimed at unseating the regime of Saddam Hussein since 1991 and that, among other things, the Clinton administration scaled down its contribution from \$40 million in 1992 to less than \$20 million because no tangible results had been achieved by the INC.⁵⁸² Against this tide of mounting negative information, which was detrimental to the reputation and standing of Iraqi opposition, the INC had to respond. Whilst Chalabi was in Kurdistan, he instructed the INC's London office to refute these "allegations and

⁵⁸⁰Interview with Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun in London on 5th September 1999. See also Michael A. Gunter, *The Kurdish Predicament: A Political Analysis* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), p. 44.

⁵⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 44.

subversive and hostile propaganda exercises". On 28th April 1995, an INC statement was distributed to the press, categorically denying receipt of funds from any source, local, regional or foreign:

On 11th April [1995] *The New York Times* published a totally unfounded story claiming that the Central Intelligence Agency had asked Congress to earmark \$150m for certain parties in the Iraqi opposition including the INC in order to disrupt and unsettle the regime of Saddam Hussein. The newspaper also claimed that the Agency had in 1992 allocated \$40m to weaken the Iraqi President, that it later reduced this amount to \$20m and that the INC was among those opposition groups which were receiving funds from that establishment. These details were said by the lady reporter to have been supplied by the U. S. administration.

The INC utterly denies receipt of any funds from any American, foreign or Arab government, and stresses that these fabrications are totally untrue. The INC also declares that the Executive Council has decided to demand that the newspaper publish the names of the parties alleged to have received any such funds. We reiterate that all members of the INC Presidential and Executive Councils work for free on voluntary bases, prompted by their patriotic commitments and sense of responsibility towards their own people.⁵⁸³

But such refutations did little or nothing to alleviate the suspicion with which even members of INC's own leadership viewed INC funding. In withdrawing from the INC, the Communist Party cast aspersions on the way in which the INC finances were administered:

One of the negative aspects of INC's operations is its financial policies. There is no clear budget or balance sheet showing the sources of INC's finances. There is furthermore no specific body or Committee responsible for INC's spending. This situation places the INC under all sorts of

⁵⁸²E. Sciolino, "CIA Asks Congress for \$19 Million to Undermine Iraq's Rulers and Rein In Iran", *New York Times*, 12th April 1995, p. 4.

⁵⁸³"INC Executive Council Statement, London, dated 28th April 1995", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 45, 1995, p. 27.

suspensions and prompts people to speak ill of this state of affairs.⁵⁸⁴

Soon after publication of the Communist Party's statement, the INC countered by stressing that Iraqis should, despite differences of opinion, never lose sight of their main target: unseating the regime of Saddam Hussein. The INC's statement went on to say that "discussion of question of funding resulted in agreement on the necessity to diversify sources and that proper procedures would be followed to regulate INC's spending policy, in accordance with a budget plan to be prepared by relevant offices under the supervision of the Financial Office".⁵⁸⁵

The question of INC funding is still shrouded in mystery. There is no conclusive evidence as to what the financial resources of the INC were, except allegations, counter-allegations and accusations. However, despite the fact that there is no proof that the vast amount of INC expenditure comes from Chalabi's own account, as he insists, the question of foreign funding remains a more logical explanation. It is here that the U.S. role as a likely financial backer emerges. On the other hand, there is little to suggest that the INC has received any Arab funds, as all Arab states mistrust both Chalabi and the INC.

Targeting Chalabi's One-Man Show

Despite the vilification campaign and subversive propaganda which the Baghdad regime continued to launch against INC President Ahmad Chalabi, and despite the

⁵⁸⁴Communist Party Memorandum to the INC's Executive Council dated 15th January 1994", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 12, p. 22.

⁵⁸⁵"Statement by INC Executive Council In Response To The Communist Party Memorandum", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 1994, p. 24.

immense difficulties and challenges, with which the INC was confronted, he managed, thanks mainly to his U. S. backers, to give a façade of resilience and continuity. Although almost all those who resigned from the INC directed their criticism towards INC president Ahmad Chalabi, the vast majority did not mention his name openly but referred to him either indirectly or in his official capacity. However, with the passage of time and with the mounting frustration over INC's failure to produce tangible results, attacks on Chalabi became more virulent and personal. An example of this may be seen in a letter by the leader of Iraqi Democrats, Muwaffaq Fattouhi, who was an elected member of INC's Consultative Committee. In his letter, Fattouhi expresses bitter disappointment not only at Chalabi himself but also at practically everybody associated with the INC Councils, Committees and National Assembly:

I hereby reiterate once more, with extreme sorrow, that no respect whatsoever has been shown to any Committee or body within the INC, nor to any resolution adopted by the INC since its creation until now. I will go further and declare that while I do not wish to hold any particular person or party responsible for INC's failure to accomplish the aims which had been defined upon establishment of the INC, I declare that Dr Ahmad Chalabi's responsibility in rendering the INC inactive and paralyzed is great. Let me also put on record that everyone (be they individuals, parties, blocs or independents) has taken part in the process, which has driven the INC into this unenviable situation, on account of their leniency, easygoing, self-serving approach and, above all, their reluctance to make him [Chalabi] account for his persistent violation of the constitution and resolutions of the INC as well as the principles of democracy and collective leadership.⁵⁸⁶

Chalabi's personal hegemony over the affairs of the INC prompted many critics to attribute all political and operational failures of the INC to Chalabi's style of

management which they saw as highly individualistic, secretive and autocratic. He was so notorious for strengthening his grip on every joint in the INC that a "new political terminology was added to the political lexicon: 'Chalabi's one-man show'".⁵⁸⁷

To enhance his standing amongst the Iraqi opposition, Chalabi squandered a great deal of INC's money on propaganda and public relations exercises. His overriding concern was to appear as the uncontested leader of the INC and the future leader of Iraq. Admittedly, he was quite successful in this respect. Over a short period of time, "he rose from an unknown entity to become a household word in Iraqi opposition".⁵⁸⁸ While he supervised the day-to-day business of INC's London Office, Chalabi needed a publicity apparatus and spin-doctors to highlight his activities and present him in favourable light. To that end, he chose Ms. Rand Al-Rahim, a close confidante and good friend of his to take charge of Chalabi's public relations activities through the Iraqi Foundation in Washington.⁵⁸⁹

The U.S.A and Ahmad Chalabi

In the face of mounting criticism, the INC resorted to a new defence mechanism. Casting aside its hyperbolic bent, it now adopted a more realistic and more apologetic tone of voice. This change however was inevitable as INC failures accumulated and detractors multiplied. Above all else, however, was the fact that

⁵⁸⁶ "Dr Muwaffaq Fattouhi's Resignation from the INC", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 50, 1996, p. 54.

⁵⁸⁷ Adel Raouf, "Qiraa Fi Tajribat Al-Mutamar Al-Watani Al-Iraqi", *Dirasat Iraqiya* (A Reading of INC's Experience), *Iraqi Studies*, Vol. 2, 1997, p. 13.

⁵⁸⁸ Interview with ex-INC spokesman Salah Al-Shaikhli in London 5th October 1999. .

U.S.-INC relations were going through a period of cooling off, if not of deterioration. A tragic misunderstanding had compounded the situation:

While the INC and its allies were under the impression that they were operating with the full support and "unqualified backing of the United States government, the White House and the CIA simply regarded the INC as a useful thorn to stick in Saddam's flesh, along with sanctions and whatever subterranean plot could be concocted to overthrow the dictator by means of a palace coup. In other words, the INC was only half of a two-pronged U. S. strategy.... The INC brought an added bonus in that the adherence of the Kurds to this opposition group forestalled Kurdish moves towards independence, something that was always anathema to America's ally Turkey, facing its own Kurdish insurgency.⁵⁹⁰

David Wurmser goes so far as to suggest that in 1995, the United States had deliberately rendered Chalabi "toothless", not only before other opposition groups with which the CIA had established close contacts, but also in the eyes of the political powers in Kurdistan, the adopted home and base of the INC.⁵⁹¹ The embattled INC president was therefore compelled to soften his attitude and attempt to mend fences with the opposition groups, both within the INC and outside it. This can be seen from the numerous statements released by its London office or voiced directly by Ahmad Chalabi through media interviews.

⁵⁸⁹Interview with Saad Salih Jabr in London on 1st April 1998. However, in a telephone conversation with Ms Rahim on April 28th 1998, she stressed the fact that the Institute was totally independent and that she focuses her research projects on Iraqi opposition. Interviews with a wide variety of Iraqi opposition groups however have shown that the Iraqi Foundation was perceived to be one of Chalabi's media fronts.

⁵⁹⁰Andrew and Patrick Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, p. 57.

⁵⁹¹David Wurmser, *Tyranny's Ally: America's failure To Defeat Saddam Hussein* (Washington, D. C: The American Enterprise Institute, 1999), p. 15.

One such statement came in the form of a press release circulated among Iraqi opposition figures and later published in *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi* in August 1995. In it, Chalabi seeks to justify INC dealing with the United States as being the direct result of "the adventures of the Saddam Hussein regime which made the United States an essential element in the Iraqi equation".⁵⁹² He then attempts to disarm INC's critics by admitting that mistakes were made:

True, many mistakes were made in the course of INC action. But the role played by political powers outside the INC was confined to belittling the achievements of the INC. They did not launch any initiative aimed at developing Iraqi opposition performance so that greater achievements might be realised. Within the INC, responsibility is borne by all. Just as no achievement can be credited to this party or that, no failure may be attributed to this group or that. We all bear equal responsibilities in failures and successes, each according to their actions and resources. This neither constitutes a condemnation of any particular party nor an attempt to shun responsibility. ... It is therefore incumbent upon all of us, inside the INC and outside it, to search for ways of supporting Iraqi opposition activities and improving its performance in such a way as to surmount internal impediments so that we may devote all our energy to the more difficult and more noble task of toppling Saddam Hussein. We further believe that a responsible dialogue on the national level may perhaps help obliterate the causes of misunderstanding which strained relations among Iraqi opposition movement, including the INC. It is indeed regrettable that so many parties have either suspended their membership or withdrawn completely from the INC. But let this unfortunate development prod us to review the situation and examine our course of action so that we may heal the fault lines which have appeared in its body.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹²Ahmad Chalabi, "Al-Mu'tamar Al-Watani Al-Iraqi Al-Muwahhad Wa Masouliyat Al-Qiwa Al-Siyasiya" (The INC and the Responsibilities of the Political Powers), *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 44, 1995, p. 18.,

⁵⁹³*Ibid.*, pp. 18-9.

Boycotts and Withdrawals from the INC

It has become axiomatic among Iraqi circles to say that most of the problems, which were confronted by the INC leadership, were inherent in the nature of political opposition work in Iraq, which was always couched in secrecy and mistrust of others. Those now seeking to replace the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein with a truly democratic regime were not really used to concessions and compromise for the good of the whole. But there were other difficulties. To many within the INC, Ahmad Chalabi was an "administrator, used to running a bank rather than a political movement".⁵⁹⁴ Admittedly, according to Abdul-Hussein Shaban, Chalabi was quite efficient and effective himself. He was however understandably inclined to be impatient with people less committed to working long hours than himself. He would act rather than consult, especially as consultation delayed effective and speedy action.⁵⁹⁵

Criticism of the INC and Ahmad Chalabi in particular was never in short supply. Hardly a few months after the Salah Al-Din Conference had boasted of a new beginning of concerted action against the regime of Saddam Hussein and of new initiatives to include all the other parties which were still operating outside the umbrella of the INC, than a wave of resignations and withdrawals began to bedevil the INC. In so doing, many of the opposition groups came to reflect similar attitudes to those of Iraqis inside the country who did not, in the main, believe that the INC had any credible plans to bring about change in Iraq or, according to Cordesman and Hashim, any

tangible agenda on how to avoid a collapse of central authority once Saddam was overthrown, or meaningful plans to reconstruct Iraq in the post-Saddam era. Furthermore, the exiles' integrity and political judgement were questioned by many Iraqis. Many exile groups were seen as paid agents of Western or Arab intelligence services and governments, or as tainted by having strong ties with an Iran that is seen as the historical enemy. Iraqi officials like Barzan Al-Tikriti encouraged such feelings by denouncing the opposition for 'prostituting' themselves to foreign governments.⁵⁹⁶

Besides the wave of resignations and withdrawals from the INC there was also much criticism in the Arabic language press over various personalities within the INC. Members of the opposition, both inside and outside the opposition, were all too inclined to criticize each other and contradict each other's statement in the leading Arabic press, which was mostly based in London. This public airing of dirty linen may have made good copy, but was in no small measure damaging to the image of the Iraqi opposition.

Al-Kutla Al-Islamiya

Among the earliest to freeze its membership of the INC was *Al-Kutla Al-Islamiya* (the Islamic Block) which declared on 24th January 1993 that it would no longer sit on INC's Committees "unless its leadership reviewed its policies in such a way as to reflect the wishes of the Iraqi masses".⁵⁹⁷ It furthermore accused the INC of being a tool in the hands of the United States, "the arch enemy" of the Iraqi people. The statement in which it announced its withdrawal was quite accusatory:

⁵⁹⁴Interview with Abdul-Hussein Shaban in London 5th January 2000.

⁵⁹⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁶Anthony H. Cordesman and Ahmed S. Hashim, *Iraq: Sanctions and Beyond* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), p. 67.

⁵⁹⁷"The Islamic Bloc in Iraq Declares withdrawal from Iraqi National Congress", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 25, 1994, 9. 12.

After the 1968 coup, the real situation became crystal clear to all discerning Iraqis. America was not only the mastermind behind the aggressive war against Iran, which was started in order to exhaust the resources of both countries, it was also behind the invasion of Kuwait. Through this invasion, the United States was hoping to realize its long-term strategies, at the forefront of which, is the tightening of its psychological and political control over the region. It also aims at pushing the Arabs to shamefully surrender to Israel in return for nothing. The United States is furthermore working assiduously to prolong the life of Saddam Hussein's regime as much as possible in order to ensure that its interests are not undermined. It was also behind the brutal suppression of the Iraqi Intifada of March 1991. All that the United States is interested in is to use the Iraqi opposition as a card, which it could wave in the face of Saddam Hussein if and when he demurs or shows any reluctance to carry out U. S. orders.⁵⁹⁸

Executive Council Member Abdul Sattar Al-Duri

Abdul-Sattar Al-Duri, the veteran Ba'thist, who until February 1990 held important political and diplomatic posts, was among the earliest politicians to announce withdrawal from the INC's Executive Council. Al-Duri, who had represented the Ba'th Party in the first National Front to be formed after the establishment of the Iraqi republic⁵⁹⁹, published the text of his resignation letter on 7th February 1993. In it, he pointed out that he was disappointed by the results of the Salah Al-Din conference which "fell far short of his expectations". He issued an impassioned appeal to Iraqis of all persuasions and ethnic descent to form an alternative opposition organization devoted to toppling the presidency of the current [INC] Executive Council and the "convening of a preparatory meeting to be attended by all opposition parties" in order to democratically elect a new leadership qualified to spearhead the struggle of our people to liberate Iraq from "dictatorship, isolation and famine".⁶⁰⁰ Al-Duri's call

⁵⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁹⁹Interview with Abdul-Sattar Al-Duri in London on 18th February 2000.

⁶⁰⁰Letter signed by Abdul-Sattar Al-Duri dated 7th January 1993.

upon all "brothers and friends, Arabs, Kurds, Islamists, nationalists, democrats, socialists, Communists and independent patriots" fell on deaf ears and his initiative was doomed to failure before it got off the ground.

Executive Council Secretary General Abdul Hussein Shaban

Seven months later, the INC was dealt another severe psychological blow when, on 16th July 1993, Abdul-Hussein Shaban, an ex-Communist-turned-liberal democrat, who had been picked to be INC's Executive Council Secretary General, tendered his resignation. This was in protest, among other things, against the way in which Chalabi was steering the INC. In his memorandum, Shaban strongly attacked INC's emphasis on public relations exercises and its total reliance on the international factor to supplant the regime of Saddam Hussein. He further noted that he could no longer "accept the temperamental and autocratic methods of Ahmad Chalabi". He also accused INC of ignoring the aspirations of the Iraqi people and of adopting a political discourse that is out of touch with the Iraqi man in the street:

Our prevalent discourse has so totally ignored the temperament of the man in the street that there exists at the moment a wide gulf, which separates our movement from the citizenry. Our lines of contact with the ordinary Iraqis have grown weaker and weaker, while a thick impenetrable wall arose between our compatriots and us. Unless we rectify the situation there is very little hope that we will ever succeed in our mission.⁶⁰¹

Shaban also stressed that through its support of the UN-imposed sanctions, the INC had played into the hands of Saddam Hussein, who was quick to exploit this stance

⁶⁰¹"Memo by Abdul-Hussein Shaban to INC Presidential and Executive Councils", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi (Iraqi File)*, vol. XI (1993), pp. 24-5.

and portray INC as puppets and instruments in the hands of foreign powers.⁶⁰² Shaban further objected to what he saw "as undue compulsion for the INC to recognize Kuwait's new border with Iraq".⁶⁰³

Da'wah Party

Other condemnations of the INC soon followed. On 28th August 1993, the Da'wah Party issued a statement in which it too severed relations with the INC. It is to be remembered that the Da'wah Party had joined the INC in order to achieve a number of objectives. Chief among these was the desire to:

increase the proportion of the Islamists within the INC and to expose the INC's sources of INC funding and the extent of foreign involvement in this national project. We further wanted to abort all attempts at accusing us of working against what most observers at first considered a worthy and noble struggle against dictatorship in Iraq.⁶⁰⁴

In its justification of the decision to withdraw, the Da'wah Party cited a number of differences with the INC, which it accused of being under the influence of foreign powers seeking to undermine the independence of the Iraqi political will. The Party's communiqué also referred to the numerous attempts made by the Da'wah party to "correct the course of those influential elements within the INC". In announcing its withdrawal from INC, the Da'wah Party communiqué cited what has become a

⁶⁰²*Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶⁰³Michael Gunter, *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: a Political Analysis* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), p. 39.

familiar refrain: its firm belief in "the necessity to unite opposition work in order to remove the regime of Saddam Hussein" and that despite this deep-rooted belief, it could no longer cooperate with the INC in the establishment of which it had played an important role.⁶⁰⁵

The Da'wah Party which had registered reservations as to the way in which the INC was run reiterates its stand that the Iraqi opposition movement is need of a new strategy which is capable of mobilizing all Iraqi resources inside and outside of Iraq, harmonizing the political discourse and ensuring independence of our political struggle. During the ten months which elapsed since the Salah Al-Din Conference, we made every effort to alert the INC leadership of the necessity to correct the mistakes made and indicated our willingness to cooperate with the influential parties within the INC to rescue it from the negative milieu surrounding it. Despite our sincere and serious efforts failed to detect any sign of reform or movement in the right direction.⁶⁰⁶

The Communist Party

Another blow to the INC came in January 1994, when the Communist Party threatened to suspend cooperation with INC. The Communists had attended the Salah- Al-Din Conference and joined the other INC founding members, despite their suspicion of the connection between the CIA and the INC.⁶⁰⁷ Despite this legitimate suspicion, they did so in order that they may not be left out in the cold, now that the

⁶⁰⁴Interview with Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, Da'wah Party Representative in London on 1st March 2000. It might be added that the Da'wah Party joined INC in order that it may appear as a party that renounces violence and upholds dialogue, especially as the Party leadership is convinced that the U. S. considers it "a terrorist organisation". Al-Da'wah Party was vigorously opposed to international involvement in Iraq, it nevertheless did not object to "regional involvement in this question. See "Speech by Da'wah Politbureau member Ibrahim Al-Jaffari on the Anniversary of Muhammad Sadiq Al-Sadr's Myrtardom", *Sout Al-Iraq*, 3rd March 2000, p. 5.

⁶⁰⁵"Communiqué by Hizb Al-Da'wah Al-Islamiya dated 9th Rabi Al-Awwal 1414 A. H. (28th August 1993)", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 21 (1993), p. 24. .

⁶⁰⁶*Ibid.*, p. 24.

new world order threatened to greatly reduce their political impact in Iraqi opposition. In joining the INC, they were also hoping to establish some sort of dialogue, albeit indirect, with the United States. They were furthermore apprehensive of being submerged by the tide of the Islamic movement in Iraq which, they feared, might eradicate the Communist party altogether.⁶⁰⁸

Announcing their threat to withdraw, the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued a lengthy memorandum in which it strongly criticized the INC leadership, accusing its Presidential and Executive councils of being inactive and ineffectual. The Communists also picked serious holes in the INC's political discourse, which "did not touch the sentiments of the masses". They further voiced strong objections to the INC's position on: the UN sanctions, embargo on the people of Iraq, especially in Kurdistan, the demarcation of borders with Kuwait and the air raids against the Iraqi capital. The INC was, according to the Communists, no more than a media front with no real mechanism for political or operational activities.⁶⁰⁹ Among other charges directed against the INC, the Communist Party cited Chalabi's unswerving belief in the United States as the future saviour of Iraq:

The most noticeable and persistent shortcoming of the INC is its total reliance on the international factor, specifically the United States, which is seen as the only power capable of assessing the situation in Iraq and of drawing its future. This naturally led to the total disregard of the domestic factor,

⁶⁰⁷Interview with ex- INC Liaison Officer, Muhammad Ihsanin London on 15th January 2000; Cockburn, *Resurrection*, pp. 165-6.

⁶⁰⁸Interview with ex-Communist Party Central Committee member, Majid Al-Yasiri in London on 1st September 1999.

⁶⁰⁹"Communist Party Memorandum to INC's Executive Council dated 15th January 1994", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 12, p. 22.

which should be considered decisive in resolving the struggle for political change in our country.⁶¹⁰

The Communists threatened to sever links with the INC unless the latter "mended its ways" by taking an independent course and refraining from the practice of raising the hopes of the Iraqis, through propagation of the false notion that deliverance would come from certain states. The financial policies of the INC also came under fire. The Communists sought transparency and accountability and insisted on rejecting all foreign aid, from whichever quarter it came, if any strings were attached. They also insisted on being informed of all details of INC accounts through the creation of a supervisory financial Committee, which should be entrusted with the task of controlling INC coffers. Reactivating the different Committees and other INC organs was another demand the Communists insisted upon. They questioned the validity of "the sectarian and ethnic basis on which the INC was founded" and sought to effect a genuine reform of its organizational structure through the adoption of "political criteria" when assessing the strength and popularity of each political grouping.⁶¹¹

Fearing that the Communists would abandon the INC, Ahmad Chalabi hastened to contain the crisis by dispatching a high powered delegation, which included two eminent members of the INC Executive Council: Hani Al-Fikaiki and Latif Rashid. The negotiations, which lasted two days, reflect the anxiety of the INC not to lose any more allies. The INC press release, which followed the lengthy sessions, clearly shows the reconciliatory tone of Chalabi's envoys, who vowed to do all they could to uphold the principles of fairness and democracy in their dealings with their

⁶¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 23.

colleagues. They further asserted their intention to broaden INC's relations with the outside world and to forge new alliances with regional and international powers through developing the INC's relations with the parliaments and political parties of these states.⁶¹²

Union of Iraqi Democrats

In May 1994, another Iraqi dissident group severed relations with INC. The Union of Iraqi Democrats, which includes a number of Iraqi intellectuals, some of whom had at one point or other been associated with Marxist ideology, also decided to boycott the INC. Their reasons for abandoning the INC were included in a press release distributed on 29th May 1994:

Many and great developments took place with regard to the Iraqi opposition, especially within the leadership of the INC. These were embodied in the collapse of the principle of collective leadership and the personal hegemony of the president of the INC. The INC newsletter, broadcasting and television stations are operating under direct command of the INC president. The Executive Council which is supposedly in charge of directing these establishments has been deprived of its supervisory role. The Broadcasting Corporation, which is a private company, owned by the INC president takes no directives except from INC president. INC finances are still a mystery, which the Executive Council president keeps to himself. ...[Against this background] the presence of our representative in the INC has become meaningless. Let it be known however that while we have no wish to be dragged into personal squabbles, which might hurt the Iraqi national movement, we will, on the other hand, not refrain from exposing those who seek to push the Iraqi opposition to engage in issues detrimental to its cause and to the future of Iraq.⁶¹³

⁶¹²"INC's Executive Council Memorandum Responding to the Communist Party Memorandum", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, 12, p. 24.

⁶¹³Final statement of the 4th Annual Congress of the Union of Iraqi Democrats", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 30, 1994, p. 31.

INC Executive Council Member Talib Shabib

On 18th June 1994, INC Executive Council member, Talib Shabib, who had served as Foreign Minister in the first Ba'thist government in 1963 and worked as Arab League ambassador to the Court of St James during the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War, tendered his resignation from the Council.⁶¹⁴ In it, he included a vehement attack on Chalabi, whom he described as a "company director who is a political novice":

The least that can be said of the Executive Council is that many of its members are not known, either by name or by their history or struggle. If you ask any Iraqi inside the country to recognise half the members, they will find it an impossible task. Even I, a member of the Council itself, cannot do this.

As for the way in which the Executive Council operates, let it be known that its president runs it as company director and not the head of a big political alliance. The secretive manner in which the finances of the INC are handled has made it possible for the president of the INC to impose his will, pay some or deprive others. This state of affairs has rendered INC offices devoid of any meaning, influence or power. Even Presidential Council members and those on the INC pay roll never fail to express their complaints and disgust.⁶¹⁵

Escalating his tactics, Chalabi responded, a week later, by publishing a lengthy rebuttal in which he accused those who criticize him of being "politically bankrupt and envious of the successes" scored by the INC on many fronts:

It is indeed puzzling that that the ideas contained in. . . [Shabib's statement] come from a member of INC's Executive Council, who has every right to contribute to the drawing up of INC's strategic policies and decision-making process. He furthermore has all the freedom to express his views within the

⁶¹⁴Interview with Al-Duri on 5th February 2000.

⁶¹⁵Talib Shabib, "Al-Azma Al-Iraqiya Wa Al-Hal An Al-Hal Al-Mughayir" (The Iraqi Crisis and the Search for an Alternative), *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 31, 1994, p 14.

organizational structure of the INC and through its conferences, meetings and through all its channels.

What is even more puzzling is that the ideas presented [by Shabib] were never voiced until tangible successes of INC's struggle against the dictatorship were seen on the ground and deep inside our fettered country. . . . The writer's belated criticism of the structure of the Executive Council is undoubtedly motivated by a desire other than that which is professed by the writer. Its members were chosen by the INC's General Assembly and have been carrying out their duties for a long time. All that is clearly intended is to belittle the honourable members and make light their contributions.⁶¹⁶

INC Deputy President Hani Al-Fikaiki

On 10th December 1994, Hani Al-Fikaiki informed INC's president that he no longer wished to serve as his deputy, indicating at the same time, his wish to withdraw from the Executive Council.⁶¹⁷ But he was apparently persuaded to continue his cooperation with the INC. He remained on the Executive Council until 4th January 1996 when he again tendered his resignation. Al-Fikaiki snubbed INC president Chalabi when he addressed his letter of resignation not to him directly, but to the president of INC General Assembly, the veteran Kurdish dissident Ibrahim Ahmad. In his resignation, which was accepted this time, Al-Fikaiki raised many issues, albeit indirectly, against INC president Chalabi:

It is indeed regrettable and extremely sad that certain elements at the highest level of INC leadership should use the INC in such a way as to impose tactics and strategies which are at variance with the lofty ideals the INC had pledged to pursue in its original charter. It is unfortunate that these elements have all along been seeking to exploit the INC for their own personal and partisan gains. What augments the suffering and misery of Iraq's citizenry is that they have been plagued by this type of political opposition. . . . This state of degenerate affairs has

⁶¹⁶Ahmad Chalabi, "Ta'qiban Ala Talb Shadib: Ta'abir Al-Azma Al-Iraqiya Wa Al-Ibhar Fi Al-Sarab" (Responding to Talib Shabib: Surmounting the Iraqi Crisis and Sailing Through A sea of Mirage", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 31, 1994, p. 16.

⁶¹⁷*Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 42, 1995, p. 27.

meted out a terrible blow to ambitions, not only of the political powers of the nation but also to all Iraqis.⁶¹⁸

General Assembly Member Muhammad Hamawand

Voicing bitter resentment of INC's "dubious contacts" with foreign governments, Dr Muhammad Hamawand, a highly respected independent Kurd submitted on 15th April 1995 his resignation from the General Assembly, stating that INC's General Assembly was "a dead body" and that he found it difficult to be associated "with an opposition that is on the pay roll of a foreign power".⁶¹⁹ Dr Hamawand was very critical of Chalabi's hegemony over the INC, which he considered a great hindrance to INC performance. He also viewed Chalabi not only as a "political opportunist", but also a "profiteer who trades in political opposition".⁶²⁰

Presidential Council Member Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun

Bahr Al-Uloun views Chalabi as a conspirator who never tires of weaving intrigues in order to further his own agenda. He was especially angered when he was left in the dark while important decisions were taken in the name of the INC Presidential Council. Chalabi, feeling that the INC had become almost totally inactive, if not paralyzed, especially as the situation in Kurdistan was deteriorating due to the armed rivalry between the KDP and PUK, hastened to form a new alliance which included these two parties as well as SCIRI and General Hasan Al-Naqib. The aim of this alliance, concluded on 17th November 1994, was to pave the way for armed operations and also to divert the attention of the Kurdish parties from internal

⁶¹⁸"Hani Al-Fikaiki's Letter of Resignation from INC", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 50, 1996, p. 53.

⁶¹⁹"Muhammad Hamawand Withdrwas from the INC", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 42, 1995, p. 27.

conflicts to fighting against their common enemy, the regime of Saddam Hussein. The alliance also aimed at bringing in the armed "Badr battalion" of the SCIRI in order to strengthen the military wing of the INC. Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun, who had not been consulted, found himself outside the new alliance which, among other things, aimed at enhancing the confrontation with the Baghdad regime. One of the clauses of the new alliance stipulated that SCIRI was the sole representatives of all Islamists in Iraq.⁶²¹ This in effect sealed Al-Uloun's fate and rendered him a total political outcast.

Bahr Al-Uloun considered this move quite unconstitutional "since neither the Executive nor Presidential Councils had been advised of it".⁶²² He further pointed out that:

The ill-advised move threatens not only the future of the INC but also the future of Iraq as a whole. I have publicly stated that and, in a cable addressed to my two fellow Presidential Council members[Hassan Mustafa Al-Naqib and Masoud Barzani], condemned the infamous agreement which contradicts all the ideals of democracy to which some INC Council members paid only lip service. I have also written to Dr Chalabi and asked him to circulate the cable among all Executive Council members, asking at the same time, an urgent meeting be held to condemn those who had signed the Agreement.⁶²³

In another letter addressed to the Presidential Council, Bahr Al-Uloun attacked the political strategy adopted by the INC. He singled out for criticism reliance on the international factor, stressing it was "a big mistake, as foreign powers put their

⁶²⁰Interview with Muhammad Hamawand in London on 26th March 2000.

⁶²¹Text of the unpublished agreement dated 17th November 1994.

⁶²²"INC Presidential Council Member Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun Announces Withdrawal From INC And Calls For An Islamic Front", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 42, 1995, p. 28.

⁶²³Bahr Al-Uloun's letter addressed INC Presidential and Executive Councils members dated on 17th December 1994.

interests ahead of those of our country and nation".⁶²⁴ He also attacked Chalabi for keeping everybody in the INC, including the Presidential Council, the highest body within the INC, in the dark, with regard to the sources of INC funding:

Chalabi must hasten to clarify this highly sensitive issue and at least inform the Presidential Council of the sources of INC funding. His claim that a few well-to-do Iraqis had contributed generously to the INC and that he was compelled to place a total black-out on their identity to protect their relatives and friends in Iraq from certain savage reprisals cannot convince anyone. In point of fact, all INC members, without exception, suspect that there is something fishy about this question.⁶²⁵

National Reform Movement Leader Sami Azara Al-Majoun

Sami Azara Al-Majoun, leader of the National Reform Movement in Iraq also expressed anger over the secrecy in which the question of INC funding was kept. One of the seven points he raised against the INC focused on the rumours, which surfaced even in the press⁶²⁶ about the INC's funds. He was further frustrated when his attempts to clarify this point had consistently been ignored.⁶²⁷

In his 22nd June 1995 statement, Al-Majoun explained why he suspended his party's membership of the INC. His objections were summarized in six points:

1. Dictatorship of the INC leadership

⁶²⁴"Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloum's Memorandum Concerning Suspension of his INC Membership", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 43, p. 29.

⁶²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 29

⁶²⁶See for example the letter sent by Prof. Kemal Majid to the editor of *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi* in which he discusses the fate of \$40m. allegedly "squandered" by the Iraqi opposition, in *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 43, 1995, p. 30.

⁶²⁷Sami Azara Al-Majoun's statement on the suspension of his INC Membership", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 43, 1995, p. 32.

2. Absence of any political vision or strategies. This serious flaw was made even more serious by "Chalabi's total hegemony over all aspects of INC activities"
3. Rumours in the press are rife about the sources of INC's funds. All attempts at seeking clarifications about this point have been ignored
4. INC's failure to establish balanced relations with Iraq's neighbouring countries, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and especially Syria "which is capable of providing immense help in the struggle to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein".
5. INC's failure to provide any tangible help to the suffering masses of Iraq. This negligence led to the INC's "loss of their support and negatively influenced Iraqi opposition".
6. The proportion of tribal opposition groupings to Saddam Hussein is much smaller than their actual political influence, size and impact on the struggle of the Iraqis.
7. The Kurdish-Kurdish conflict shook the confidence of all Iraqis in the profitability of adopting the Kurdish region as the INC field of action.⁶²⁸

Islamic Movement in Kurdistan

More poignant is the letter sent by the Islamic Movement in Kurdistan in which it suspended its membership in the INC. In an interview with the London-based *Al-Hayat* daily, the Movement's spokesman, Ihsan Abdul-Aziz criticized the INC's lack of democracy and singled out INC's secret funding. Abul-Aziz who attacked "the extravagant life style of the INC leaders" points out that:

We have no idea as to how the INC manages to cover its expenditures. Chalabi, contrary to all principles of democracy, refuses to provide any explanation. The Americans, on the other hand, confirmed that they have been

⁶²⁸Sami Azara Al-Majoun's statement on the suspension of his INC Membership", *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 43, 1995, p. 32.

giving financial aid to the INC, despite Chalabi's denials and claims that a number of benevolent states are providing help. On our part, we have taken care to fund our own participation in the INC whether inside the country or outside it. Even our transportation was paid from our funds.⁶²⁹

National Democratic Turkoman Movement

Aziz Al-Qadiri, Secretary General of the National Democratic Turkoman Movement issued on 13th June 1995 a statement in which he declared suspension of its membership in the INC because of the

many mistakes, which have become characteristic of the way the INC operates, absence of democracy, the total disregard of its constitution and rules of procedure as well as the dictatorial manner in which the affairs of the INC are handled.⁶³⁰

Iraqi National Accord Movement

Even INC's closest ally, the Iraqi National Accord Movement began boycotting INC functions, keeping only their membership in the National Assembly. They did however reserve the right to withdraw from the Assembly at a later date, if the INC failed to take practical measures to amend its constitution, review its organizational structure and formulate a well-thought out and practical plan of action aimed at toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein. No objection or criticism was, however, raised against the question of INC funding.⁶³¹ Like other Iraqi opposition groups, the National Accord Movement strongly objected to Chalabi's reluctance to hold General

⁶²⁹“The Islamic Movement in Kurdistan Suspends its INC Membership”, *Al-Hayat*, 13th June 1995, p. 3.

⁶³⁰“The National Democratic Turkoman Movement Suspends its INC Membership”, *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 43, 1995, 30.

Assembly meetings for fear that he might lose his position as INC leader. The Accord Movement also resented Chalabi's grip on INC's affairs. "Whenever we ask him about why no action was taken on any particular point that had been agreed upon, he claimed that he was acting on directives from the Americans".⁶³² The National Accord Movement also felt that Chalabi had overstepped his political and media role and engaged in military activities, trespassing onto their own domain.⁶³³

Iraqi Democratic Party

On 25th May 1996 the Iraqi Democratic Party's turn came. In announcing that it would boycott all INC functions, the Democratic Party pointedly attacked INC president Chalabi as being behind most of the ills afflicting the INC. The question of INC funding was once again high on the list of points raised by the party. However, no political grouping operating under the INC banner was spared the bitter criticism voiced in the memorandum, signed by Secretary General Aziz Alayan:

Responsibility [for INC's failures] cannot be confined to the INC presidency. Other political powers, which have never taken their duties seriously, must also share the blame. For they have failed in pushing this extensive alliance to achieve its aims and have also failed to cooperate amongst themselves despite their assurances that they value coordination and joint action. They have been blinded by their own narrow interests which have led them to renounce teamwork.... Their attitudes and practices have prolonged the suffering of the Iraqis,

⁶³¹ Interview with Salah Al-Shaikhli in London on 5th October 1999. See also *The Iraqi National Accord Movement Withdraws from the INC*, *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, vol. 43, 1995, p. 31.

⁶³² Interview with National Accord member of the Central Committee and official spokesman, Salah Al-Shaikhli in London on 5th October 1999.

⁶³³ *Ibid.* The National Accord Movement which includes a number of defected Iraqi officers and ex-Ba'thists, considers military operations to be their own domain and that the INC was a political umbrella incapable of executing military operations.

weakened their faith in the opposition not only in the southern and central regions but also in liberated Kurdistan.⁶³⁴

The Impact of the Kurdish-Kurdish Conflict on the INC

The Arab opposition groups entered into an alliance with the Kurdish opposition during the Vienna Conference of June 1992 in the hope that they might be able to achieve their common objective: the toppling of President Saddam Hussein's regime. The hard reality however was that there was no "common objective". For the Kurdish movement had its own specific agenda and demands. Besides, in the nature of the historical struggle against successive Baghdad regimes, which revolved around the one demand cherished by the Kurdish movement, namely independence or at least full autonomy, there were also differences related to vision and strategy:

First, the intra-Kurdish conflict between the KDP and the PUK is a long protracted one, which has its roots in history. It started when in 1964 when PUK's leader Jalal Talbani rebelled against Mulla Mustafa Barzani, Masoud Barzani's father. This rebellion created a deep rift in the Kurdish movement which resulted in the emergence of two schools of leadership fighting over the souls of the Kurdish population in Iraq. This 36-year old conflict was one of the most devastating ailments which plagued the Kurdish movement. The inconclusive 1992 elections, the results of which pleased neither side, did not resolve the question of leadership. In point of fact, in organizing the elections, both parties were hoping to gain a landslide victory in order to eject the other party from the political arena. But the results of the election were so close that authority had to be partitioned between the two leaders.

⁶³⁴"Iraqi Democratic Party Statement on Suspending its INC Membership", *Al-Mallaq Al-Iraqi*, vol.

Second, The Kurdish movement had deserted the Iraqi opposition during the March 1991 Intifada and, prompted by a desire to exploit what seemed at the time a golden opportunity, entered into a dialogue with the Baghdad regime. Then, in August 1996, a major force within the INC and indeed within the Kurdish movement, the KDP, mended fences with Saddam Hussein's regime and negotiated with Baghdad in order to wrest back the province of Arbil from Talbani's PUK. The Arab opposition groups, on the other hand, which never swerved in their struggle against the Baghdad regime saw in the KDP's contacts with Baghdad an unnecessary move to accord the regime an undeserved legitimacy. The contacts were further seen as recognition of the dictatorial regime. Thus, "the line on the sand" drawn by the Arab opposition groups was, more than once, crossed by the Kurdish movement, which did not appear to have committed itself fully to the cause of ousting the regime in Baghdad.

Third, Following the imposition, in April 1991, of the 'No-Fly Zone' over the Safe Haven, the three liberated Kurdish districts (Arbil, Sulaumaniya and Duhawak), the situation on the ground was such that Masoud Barzani's partisans were in full control of the strategic Duhawk region, through which the overland route linking Iraq and Turkey passes. This situation enabled the Barzanis to collect substantial revenues in customs and excise. On the other hand, Jalal Talibani's forces controlled a larger area, which includes the city of Suleimaniya and a number of border posts along the Iraq-Iran borderline. The regional capital of Kurdistan, Arbil, where the Kurdish parliament is based, was held by both parties jointly.

Fourth, it was against this complex background that the resort town, Salah Al-Din, which lies within the Arbil district, was chosen as a base for the INC, following the first conference there in February 1993. Salah Al-Din was in the area controlled by Barzani with whom INC Executive Council President, Ahmad Chalabi had excellent relations at that stage. In taking the decision to base the INC in Salah Al-Din, Barzani pledged to host and protect the INC.⁶³⁵

From his base in Salah Al-Din, Chalabi was able to convince the Kurdish parties that the only way to guarantee international economic aid and political support was cooperation with the INC. The INC-Kurdish relationship was therefore transformed into an agreement of mutual interest: Kurdish protection of Arab opposition groups, against Arab opposition acceptance of federalism, self-determination for the Kurds and international support.

Fifth, Barzani exploited the presence of the INC in Salah Al-Din, which afforded his supporters a much needed income by way of renting properties and providing lucrative catering and other services to the growing numbers of INC personnel and officess.⁶³⁶ Viewing the situation in Salah Al-Din with disgruntlement and unease, Talbani felt compelled to consolidate his power in as large an area of Kurdistan as possible. Gradually, the two parties found themselves locked in an undeclared political and arms race. But the rivalry soon surfaced. When, in late 1993, Talbani felt that the Kurdish Islamic movement in the Halabcha area, which was under his control, was gaining ground, he tried to contain it, as it was perceived to be tilting in its political loyalty towards Barzani. The situation soon deteriorated and fighting

⁶³⁵Interview with Hoshiar Zibari in London on 15th January 2000. Hoshiar points out that Barzani had

between Talbani's forces and those of the Kurdish Islamic movement erupted in November 1993.⁶³⁷ The INC stepped in to negotiate a peaceful settlement to this round of Kurdish-Kurdish armed conflict and succeeded in effecting a cease-fire.

Soon afterwards, however, the dangerous situation deteriorated even further when Talbani raised a number of issues against Barzani whom he accused of supporting the Islamic movement. Among these was his insistence that the INC should adopt a neutral policy and stop supporting Barzani. Talbani who enjoyed military superiority⁶³⁸ and was in control of a larger area in Kurdistan also demanded a share of the customs revenues, which Barzani was monopolizing.

Feeling that he had a rough deal, Talbani resorted to the use of force in order to take what he considered Barzani owed him. A number of skirmishes between troops of the rival leaders took place, before the PUK finally decided to launch an assault against the headquarters of Barzan in Salah Al-Din, where the INC was based. Fighting broke out in March 1993 but the situation was soon contained, following quick intervention by the INC, which by its mediation, ended the fighting. The agreement reached stipulated that:

1. all check-points along the main overland routes in the Arbil area should be manned by INC troops

made it a condition that INC's protection is his own domain which no other person should share.

⁶³⁶Interview with Abdul Hussein Shaban in London on 5th January 2000.

⁶³⁷Interview with Ihsan Abdul Aziz, Islamic Movement's UK representative in London on 22nd February 2000.

⁶³⁸Interview with General Wafiq Al-Samaracee in London on 10th February 2000

2. the INC, which was entrusted with the task of supervising execution of the agreement, would act as arbiter should any problems arise.⁶³⁹

Following these political successes in mediation, which enabled it to deploy its troops as a peace-keeping force, the INC aspired to emerge as a third power in the Kurdish equation.⁶⁴⁰

On account of the deep-rooted conflict and the intensity of mutual suspicion and rivalry, the situation never returned to normal. Talbani felt that the deterioration of the situation could not be policed effectively by the fledgling troops of the INC which depended on arms donations from both parties. He grew more convinced that he should end Barzani for good through military confrontation. The fighting broke out much sooner than Talbani had thought. His rival took the military initiative by attacking the city of Shaqlawa which was under the control of Talbani's forces and occupied it, securing the communication lines stretching between Salah Al-Din and his military posts in the area under his control.

Talbani responded by attacking the regional capital of Kurdistan, Arbil from which he expelled Barzani's forces. With the taking of Arbil, Talbani became the dominant force in Iraqi Kurdistan. Realising that the balance of power had tipped in favour of Talbani, the INC under the leadership of Chalabi soon shifted to a more pro-Talbani's attitude. The move angered Barzani who came to view the INC as a Talbani puppet. From the occupation of Arbil onwards, the INC became hostage to the vagaries of intra-Kurdish conflict.

⁶³⁹Text of the Agreement signed by representatives of the PUK and KDP and witnessed by General Hasan Al-Naqib and Ahmad Chalabi for the INC.

⁶⁴⁰Interview with Ahmad Chalabi in London on 11th September 1999.

Talbani then moved to convince his new allies, the INC, of the necessity to push forward with armed struggle against the regime of Saddam Hussein. His plan to launch an attack against Baghdad from the North hit a chord in Ahmad Chalabi who was eager to end the perception that the INC was no more than a media front and a political umbrella.⁶⁴¹ On this basis, Chalabi began to coordinate plans with the CIA representative, known to Iraqi opposition as Bob, to launch an attack which would soon be known as the March Operations.

The March 1995 Operations

Having been deserted by most of the non-Kurdish opposition parties, the INC was quite anxious to make its presence felt and assert itself as a military power. Chalabi who had worked hard to establish a military wing within the INC was also suspicious of the intentions of his ally Ayad Allawi, leader of the *Wifaq* (Accord) group who had kept Chalabi guessing as to the nature of his relations with the United States. Chalabi feared that Allawi was perhaps being groomed by the Americans for a future role in Iraq.⁶⁴² Jalal Talbani, on the other hand, was quite enthusiastic about launching a military attack against the central government in Baghdad. Such a course of action Talbani thought, would crown him as the uncontested leader of the Kurds. He also calculated that he would be able to bring the region of Kirkuk under his control and thus realize a long-cherished Kurdish dream.⁶⁴³

Another factor which played no small part in inducing both Talbani and Chalabi to consider military action against the regime of Saddam Hussein was the unexpected

⁶⁴¹Interview with Hoshiar Zibari in London on 15th January 2000.

⁶⁴²Interview with General Samaraee in London on 10th February 2000.

⁶⁴³Interview with Hoshiar Zibari in London on 15th January 2000.

but quite timely defection of General Wafiq Al-Samaracee, Director of Saddam Hussein's military intelligence. Samaracee, who joined the opposition immediately after his flight from Iraq, raised the hopes of the opposition and made them feel a little optimistic about the possibility of effecting political change in Iraq by force. His defection furthermore made it relatively easy for Chalabi to convince the Americans that plans to unseat Saddam Hussein by the opposition were afoot.⁶⁴⁴ Chalabi also managed to elicit U.S. support for the intended military action, which would come by way of providing aerial cover.⁶⁴⁵

The INC's efforts also led to the conclusion of what came to be known as the Kwaisanjaq Accord, which was signed by Jalal Talbani, Masoud Barzani, Wafiq Samaracee and Chalabi himself. The signatories agreed, among other things, to launch concerted attacks against Iraqi forces stationed along the areas adjacent to the Kurdish autonomous region. These attacks were intended to:

- a) rebuild and enhance INC credibility
- b) encourage as many Iraqi military personnel to defect to the opposition
- c) attack chosen targets deep inside Iraqi territory

Besides the aerial cover, the Americans, according to General Wafiq Samaracee, also promised to mobilize a few military units where they had "some influence in the the central region, specifically in the Fallouja-Rashidiya sector", which was a few kilometers away from Baghdad. This move was to be timed in such a way as to coincide with the bifurcated attack against the Mosul province by Masoud Barzani's

⁶⁴⁴Interview with Hoshiar Zibari in London on 15th January 2000.

⁶⁴⁵Interview with General Samaracee in London on 10th February 2000.

forces and Jalal Talbani's advance towards the Kirkuk.⁶⁴⁶ Barzani however sensed danger. He opposed the idea of assigning the attack on Kirkuk to Talbani and insisted that PUK and KDP forces should launch it jointly. Upon Chalabi's assurances that post-Saddam Hussein Iraq would be under the command of a national leadership comprising the signatories of the Kwaisanjaq Accord, Talbani reluctantly went ahead with the plan.⁶⁴⁷

Talbani's rising popularity and mounting successes unsettled Masoud Barzani who was never enthusiastic about the plan in the first place. But Barzani could not renege on the agreement unless he had a compelling reason to extricate himself from what he considered a political and military predicament. With this in mind, he instructed his representative in London, Hoshiar Zibari, to get in touch with the American administration directly, without notifying Chalabi. Zibari's mission was to ascertain the truth and level of any U. S participation. On 3rd March 1995, hardly twenty-four hours before the start of operations, Zibari learnt that the U. S had not committed itself to the INC's plan and that it had no prior knowledge of it. When U.S. officials were told about Bob's frequent assurances that Washington knew of and supported the military operation, Zibari was told that "the cowboy [Bob] may have been exceeding his authority".⁶⁴⁸

Upon hearing this, Talbani immediately declared that he was no longer bound by the agreement, accusing Chalabi at the same time, of involving the Kurdish movement in a highly dangerous project. If it failed, said Talbani, only the Kurds would pay its heavy price. Barzani's move deepened even further the enmity with Talbani. Chalabi,

⁶⁴⁶*Ibid.*

General Samaraee and Talbani nevertheless ignored the U. S. attitude and went ahead with their plan. On 4th March 1995, an attack against infantry and motorized Iraqi divisions was launched. Iraqi recruits were called upon to defect to the opposition side. These calls appealed to their sense of loyalty to the homeland and their yearning to live in a free Iraq, away from Saddam Hussein's dictatorship.

Saddam Hussein was apparently fully aware of the rift between the PUK and KDP, and the division within the Iraqi movement in general. He had "infiltrated the INC military wing to which his Intelligence service had sent large numbers".⁶⁴⁹ Another factor which rendered the military project ineffective was the refusal of Ayyad Allawi's party *Al-Wifaq Al-Watani*, (National Accord), which included many ex-Ba'thist officers, to participate in the project. Furthermore, Allawi issued a statement in which he condemned the military move, considering it an ill-advised escapade aimed at realizing personal ambitions rather than national objectives and patriotic ideals.⁶⁵⁰

A week after the eruption of fighting, Barzani tried to make use of Talbani's preoccupation with the attacks on Saddam Hussein's forces and sought to retake Arbil from Talbani's forces, which immediately withdrew from the battlefield to repel Barzani's forces. They succeeded in their mission and on 27th March Barzani ordered his fighters to retreat. But this was achieved at the expense of the joint offensive which was underway against Saddam Hussein., which collapsed totally.

⁶⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁸Interview with Hoshiar Zibari in London on 15th January 2000.

⁶⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁰Interview with Salah Al-Shaikhli in London on 5th October 1999.

During the months which followed the failed attack, INC's relations with Masoud Barzani deteriorated. Once again, the INC became the victim of the bloody rivalry between Barzani and Talbani. The project to unseat Saddam Hussein was therefore put on hold between May 1995 and August 1996, when Barzani colluded with his erstwhile enemy, Saddam Hussein and succeeded in evicting Talbani's fighters from Arbil. Justifying this rather desperate move, Barzani claimed that his action was necessary "to prevent Iraqi territorial integrity being threatened by Iran", which he had accused of supporting Talbani.⁶⁵¹

With the storming of Arbil by Saddam Hussein's forces, the INC lost its beach-head on Iraqi soil. Upon conquering the province, Saddam Hussein's troops immediately targeted the INC headquarters in Salah Al-Din and other offices in Arbil. INC personnel, collaborators and even some sympathizers were summarily executed. Some were taken captive to Baghdad for interrogation.⁶⁵² The impact of the invasion was a devastating blow to the INC, militarily, politically and psychologically. Besides losing many men and equipment, it lost its credibility as a fighting force. Most importantly, the INC lost its greatest source of pride, the much flaunted home base, from which it had hoped to start the great march towards Baghdad.

Non-INC opposition Groups

The groups and parties which did not join the INC, which were based either in Damascus, Tehran or London, did not offer any specific political project to rival that of the INC. They did however issue a number of statements, every now and then, in

⁶⁵¹ Gunterm *Kurdish Predicament*, pp. 85-86.

⁶⁵² Zaki Shihab, "Qissat Hazimat Al-Ci Ay Ay Fi Al-Iraq" (The CIA Defeat in Iraq, *Al-Wasat*, vol 242, September 1996, pp. 10-15.

which they criticized INC tactics and orientations. They held firmly to their suspicions and criticism of the INC as embodying an American project.

Amidst an atmosphere of accusations and counter accusations, a new movement was born: the Constitutional Monarchy Movement. This movement was founded in London on 20th June 1993 by Sharef Ali Bin AlHussein, cousin to the last monarch of Iraq, the late King of Iraq Faisal II. Sharef Ali, the only survivor of the Iraqi royal family was born in Baghdad in 1956 and had until the Salah Al-Din Conference, remained aloof from partisan Iraqi politics, never favouring one group or movement over any other. He had nevertheless kept an eye on events in Iraq while maintaining his unswerving, if somewhat muted opposition to all republican regimes in Baghdad.

In launching his movement, Sharef Ali sought to respond to what he considered a political vacuum that could only be filled by his monarchist project. He embarked upon a policy, the main objective of which was to establish good relations with all colours of the political spectrum in the Iraqi opposition. In 1995, the Movement opened a chapter in the Kurdish town of Arbil, where it started a radio station to further its cause among the Iraqis who had lost touch with the monarchy since July 1958. The station, like that of the INC, was razed to the ground by Saddam Hussein's troops when they took the city of Arbil in August 1996.⁶⁵³

Sharef Ali argued that a military coup or indeed any change of government might bring with it a new dictatorship. This might entail endless reprisals and account settlements, which might develop along the same lines as in Afghanistan, Lebanon and Yugoslavia, possibly leading to the involvement of regional and foreign powers.

The first manifesto published by the Movement dwelt on the history of republican Iraq which

Proved that the pluralist democratic republican regime called for by some Iraqi political forces is unfortunately no more than a romantic slogan aimed at achieving temporary gains of no real substance. The majority of the republics in the Middle East have brought about successively greater states of chaos, and degenerated into individual or single-party dictatorships. They have also hindered the stability of their respective societies while partisan military and state security forces have worked to guarantee the re-election of their "nominated leader", thus ensuring that he remains in power for life. While it is true that ethical competition in the political arena is not only a necessity but one of the most important pillars of democracy, the reality of our society is that competition for the top position has reached a highly dangerous pitch, often subjecting our homeland to the most lethal perils and bloody conflicts. For this, all our people have had to pay the price.... [Our Movement] believes that free parliamentary elections should be conducted in an atmosphere of stability and continuity, and that the Head of State should remain above factional disputes and political maneuvering. As a guarantor of the constitution, he would be entrusted with implementing its precepts and defending the rights of all the people and their representatives in a democratically elected assembly.⁶⁵⁴

Iraqi Opposition and State Responses

Throughout the period following the invasion of Kuwait, Baghdad viewed the anti-regime activities with a mixture of anxiety, contempt, derision and sometimes even disregarded them. On the one hand, the Baghdad government feared that the efforts exerted by the opposition might succeed, which would mean the end of the regime and perhaps even the disintegration of the state. On the other hand, it was relieved by the apparent ineffectiveness and lack of unity of its opposition adversaries. The regime, however, never abandoned its unrelenting multi-fronted assault against the

⁶⁵³Shamran Al-Ajeeli, *Al-Kharita Al-Siyasiya Lil-Mu'aradha Al-Iraqiya (Political Map of Iraqi Opposition)* (London: Dar Al-Hikma, 2000), p. 314

opposition, including occasional use of the "carrot and stick" policy in its dealings with the issue.

On the security level, the regime was able to destroy and prevent the opposition from establishing any effective political, military or even terrorist bases inside the areas under the central government control. This was achieved through mobilisation of its formidable security forces to combat and curtail, with extreme brutality, the clandestine activities of different opposition groups. The regime thought nothing of despatching hit groups under diplomatic cover to eliminate any opposition element it deemed dangerous. The murder in Beirut of the dissident tribal leader, Sheikh Talib Al-Suhail is a case in point. He was gunned down at his home in Lebanon on 12th April 1994 by the Iraqi "consul", and his assistant who were later arrested at Beirut Airport by the Lebanese security forces as they were boarding a departing Jordanian plane.⁶⁵⁵

On the propaganda level, the state owned and controlled media were fully utilized to portray the opposition movement as a tool in the hands of regional enemies and imperialist powers, bent on dissecting the country in order to control it and usurp its wealth. The Baghdad regime also aimed at tarnishing the image of the opposition leadership and driving a wedge between the various groups. One such technique involved threats and intimidation by declaring that opposition figures were legitimate targets for elimination. Another was ridiculing them as agents of Iraq's enemies and as "rabble, dwarfs, traitors and strays".⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵⁴ *Constitutional Monarchy Movement Manifesto* dated 20th June 1993.

⁶⁵⁵ Interview with Al-Suhail's daughter, Saffia Al-Suhail in London on 2nd September 2000.

⁶⁵⁶ MECS 1992, p. 482.

Another technique employed by the regime was use of material and political rewards, "guarantees" of amnesty, immunity from prosecution as well as legal protection. This technique, notoriously used to lure Saddam Hussein's two sons-in-law who had defected to Jordan, was often resorted to in the hope of tempting selected opposition leaders whose return to Saddam Hussein's fold might then be fully exploited. According to ex-Iraqi Military Intelligence General wafiq Al-Samarraee, this technique was master minded by Saddam Hussein's own half-brother Barzan Al-Tikriti who served as Iraq's ambassador to the UN Geneva Headquarters. "From 1993 onwards, Barzani tried, with little success, to pursue a number of opposition activists in order to convince them to visit Baghdad and engage in a dialogue with the regime's leadership".⁶⁵⁷

The INC Assessed

Despite the withdrawals, accusations and bitter attacks to which it was subjected, the INC managed to lead the opposition for a number of years, establishing new contacts with a number of political groupings and exploiting the division and rifts within others. Immediately after the Vienna Conference, the international political climate helped INC's Executive Council President Ahmad Chalabi to transform the cause of Iraqi opposition from an Arab or, at best, regional question into an international one.

Prior to the establishment of the INC, Iraqi opposition groups did not have any allies beyond the Arab land or Middle East. True, hundreds, if not thousands of Iraqi dissidents had been forced to live in exile across Europe and the United States. These, however, did not speak with one voice against the regime of Saddam Hussein. Nor

⁶⁵⁷ Interview with Wafiq Al-Samarraei in London on 5th April 1999.

did they have any political umbrella under which they could operate, elicit support from host countries or engage in any form of cooperation with governmental or non-governmental organizations of the international community. Chalabi's outward-looking orientation was soon to lead to the emergence of new currents and trends, which were hitherto unknown in Iraqi opposition work.

It was however quite clear from the beginning that the international support obtained by Ahmad Chalabi came mainly from the United States. Washington's support of Ahmad Chalabi was, however, not entirely altruistic. In providing him with generous support, both on the financial, political and media levels, the United States was following its own agenda. Among other things, it sought to contain the opposition movement and plan its future course and use it as a tool to apply pressure on the regime in Baghdad. .

The INC was, to a certain degree, successful in forging channels with the U. S. and Europe, and in establishing a network of influential contacts with policy makers and media centres in the West, particularly in the United States and Britain, as well as with some Arab countries. This ensured that INC's delegates were well received by high-ranking officials, especially in the countries which could have impact on the Iraqi question. An indication of the great importance, which the INC attached to the media, may be seen in the fact that the INC had a large press office in London operated by a number of foreign media experts and supervised by Ahmad Chalabi himself.

Through its sympathizers inside Iraq, the INC built a web of contacts, which managed to infiltrate a number of Iraqi establishments. From these contacts, valuable and sensitive information was gathered. Some of the information received was of

exceptional value as it diagnosed the weak points of the Baghdad regime. The INC also succeeded in collecting evidence against the practices of President Saddam Hussein and a number of his lieutenants. With the assistance of the INC, Indict⁶⁵⁸ has already compiled files on high-ranking officials. This is a first step to starting legal proceedings against those accused of committing war crimes and genocide.

These achievements would not have been possible had the INC not received substantial political and financial support. What further augmented the INC's success was the dismal failure of rival opposition groups to initiate any project similar to that of the INC. Another factor which went to strengthen the position of the INC was the immense support it continued to receive from the Kurdish front. Far from being altruistic, this support however was self-serving and a way of repaying the INC for endorsing the federal solution, which the Kurds have been calling for as a way of settling their age-old grievances against successive Baghdad regimes.

However, the INC had its own drawbacks and weaknesses, some of which were quite serious. The very fact that the INC was seen to be operating under American wings was quite detrimental in that it heightened its political isolation, nationally, regionally and, towards the late nineties, internationally. Initial exaggeration, by the U. S., of the INC's power and its overestimation of its capabilities had its negative impact on the INC, as well as on Washington itself. The United States was blamed not only for the shortcomings of the INC but also for the proverbial failure of the whole opposition movement to unite in the struggle to unseat the regime of Saddam Hussein.

⁶⁵⁸ An international human rights organization which takes upon itself the task of chasing those suspected of committing crimes against humanity.

The INC leadership included many people who were either little known politically or who were out of touch with Iraq. Others were of Persian extraction. In a state which raised its children on staunch Arab nationalism, through schools, the media as well as all forms of visual and performing arts, politicians of non-Arab descent were bound to be perceived as suspect by wide segments of Iraqi society. This problem was further confounded by strong objections, reiterated even among Iraqi opposition itself, to some of INC's unpopular views and political orientation. The fact that the INC was associated with the U.S.A did not help INC's image or impact on the national scene.

Republican Iraq has always been an open field for anti-American propaganda. It would probably take long years before the perception of the U.S.A as an enemy to Arab and Iraqi interests could be eradicated from the national consciousness of the Iraqis. Quite damaging, too, was the perception, especially among the Sunni Arabs, that the INC was basically an alliance between the Kurds and Shi'as, directed mainly towards the Sunnis, whom the INC sought to remove from the power which they had traditionally held since the birth of the nation after World War I.

What weakened the INC even further was its almost total dependence on U. S. support. Its disregard of the interests and concerns of regional powers and its direct association with the CIA made regional powers feel quite suspicious and uneasy. On the other hand, the U. S financial support divided, rather than united, the groups and personalities operating under INC's umbrella, especially after it was revealed that contrary to Chalabi's assertions, INC's funds came from American sources, not "purely Iraqi sources".

A more serious charge against the INC is the fact that it failed to honour its own political programme and action plan. Despite the fact that it kept talking about the integrity of Iraqi soil, its policies were increasingly perceived by Sunnis as sectarian, as it concentrated mainly on advancing the cause of the Kurds and the Shi'as, highlighting their suffering at the hands of the regime. Its enthusiasm for federalism was considered by many to be a first step towards the partitioning of the country. On top of this, its recognition of the post-Gulf War demarcation lines between Iraq and Kuwait led to the loss of many friends and supporters, augmenting, at the same time, its opponents and adversaries.

Abandoning the spirit of teamwork, the INC was, as it were, entirely taken over by its Executive president, Chalabi, who transformed some of the opposition representatives into employees working for him in return for monthly pay. The secretive maneuvering of Chalabi, who "had little authority over Iraqis either inside or outside the country"⁶⁵⁹, his high-handedness and devious attempts at exploiting differences among rival as well as allied opposition groups and personalities, weakened the INC's standing in the eyes of most Iraqis to whom he failed to project a role model. Chalabi's defiance and secrecy, furthermore, not only estranged a number of political groupings but also made personal enemies of a host of Iraqi opposition leaders.

Eruption of the Kurdish-Kurdish conflict paralyzed not only the INC but also other Iraqi opposition groups which fell prey to frustration and despair as the conflict, among other things, shifted the focus from toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein

⁶⁵⁹ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 275.

to finding ways to contain intra-Kurdish conflicts. INC's stance on this issue was especially harmful. Its tilt towards one of the warring parties had an immense negative impact on its credibility as an umbrella for all Iraqi patriots. It hardly needs to be pointed out it also undermined its own position in Kurdistan, its operational base.

Another factor which contributed INC's failure to achieve its objectives was the speed with which the military wing was created. It is now known that a number of Saddam Hussein's agents had managed to infiltrate the INC's striking arm. INC's dilemma was thus compounded, as it had originally attracted a number of groups and individuals who had either been indecisive about taking a firm stand against the regime of Saddam Hussein, or who were still in contact with Baghdad.

The damaging impact of the INC's adoption of, and participation in, joint military operations with the CIA on Iraqi soil had an immense negative impact on the INC's reputation and role in the national struggle. Coupled with this reliance on the United States was the lack of enthusiasm and self-sacrifice on the part of those in charge of the INC. The half-hearted commitment to the cause of struggle against the Baghdad regime soon led to the disintegration of the INC and the multiplication of resignations and withdrawals from its various organs and committees.

Chalabi's attempt to use the Shi'a card to further his own agenda failed and contributed to the gradual demise of the INC. His successive visits to Tehran, during the early months of the INC, deepened the perception that he was a sectarian Shi'a who was not in a position to lead the national opposition. In his advancement of Shi'a cleric Muhammad Bahr Al-Uloun to a leading position within the INC, Chalabi was hoping to consolidate his Shi'a power base. His manoeuvre however

backfired when the venerable cleric withdrew from the INC in protest, among other things, against Chalabi's strategies and method of administering the affairs of the Council. The negative position adopted by the Da'wah Party towards the INC further weakened Chalabi's organisation, as this party enjoyed some popularity among the Shi'as and is at the forefront of the Islamic parties which had executed several successful operations against the regime of Saddam Hussein. On the other hand, the Proportion war, which the Shi'a groupings waged against other political parties shook the INC and undermined its credibility.

Conclusion

The Iraqi society, like those of many developing countries in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, has had little or no practical acquaintance with democracy. Despite the fact that Iraq was one of the earliest Arab states to gain independence, no democratic tradition ever evolved to match the advances achieved in the economic, cultural and scientific fields. This situation was the outcome of a confluence of a number of international, regional and domestic factors, which shaped political life in Iraq. Chief among these was the special social and political circumstances, which had prevailed in the country since the creation of the modern state following the conference of San Remo in April 1920. This absence of democratic practices greatly affected the Iraqi opposition, which came to be viewed with suspicion and so was severely punished.

During the monarchist period (1921-1958), the opposition parties fell mainly into two categories: the elite groupings which were mostly licensed institutions, operating openly and occasionally participating in government. These parties did not seek to topple the regime, but called for introducing economic, political or social reform. Lacking any real popular base, these parties normally revolved round the leader of the group or round a few well known political figures. The *Istiqlal* (Independence) and *Al-Watani Al-Dimocrati* (the National Democratic) parties afford the best example of these institutions.

The second category was made up of the ideological parties with large popular following. Their political work cut across all social strata and was spread over an intricate organisational structure throughout the country. These clandestine and

persecuted parties, which succeeded in penetrating the government machinery, including the armed forces, aimed at effecting political change through toppling the regime and seizing power. The Communist and Ba'th parties best illustrate this category.

These two categories however did not play a direct role in the July 1958 Revolution which ended the monarchy in Iraq. The drastic political change was effected at the hands of certain elements in the armed forces under the leadership of the Free Officers Movement. Despite contacts made by this movement with other opposition parties in Iraq, no co-ordination or organisational ties can be said to have existed between the military and the elite or ideological parties. The Free Officers Movement, however, did include a number of sympathizers with the main objectives of the ideological parties. It also included others who held leaders of the elite parties in great esteem.

Following establishment of the republic in July 1958, Iraqi opposition underwent a fundamental change. The elite parties soon lost their legitimacy and disappeared from the scene. On the other hand, the role played by the ideological parties, whether in opposition or as government allies, dramatically increased. Between 1958 and 1961 the Communist Party was quite instrumental in supporting the regime of General Qassim while the Ba'th Party and Arab nationalists spearheaded the opposition which succeeded in ending the First Republic on 8th February 1963.

As a reaction to the growth of secular and leftist parties, this period also witnessed the emergence of new Islamic groupings, both Sunni and Shi'a, dedicated to counterbalancing the activities of the secularists, especially the Communists, who

allied themselves with General Qassim. This development can be seen in the emergence of the Islamic *Tahrir* (Liberation) and the Islamic *Da'wah* (Call) parties.

February 1963 marks an important development in the history of Iraqi opposition. For the first time in modern Iraq, an opposition ideological party, the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, succeeded in ousting the military government which had been in power for almost five years. The Ba'thists, who were evicted from power in November of the same year, following bitter rivalries and division within themselves on the one hand, and between them and other powers in Iraq, were to make another successful come back in July 1968.

This Ba'thist experience is highly significant in that it sheds ample light on the political climate in Iraq. The Ba'th party lost control of the government when its military officers who had seized power in the name of the Ba'th deserted the party. Failure of the first Ba'thist regime proved that army officers or the military cadres inside the Ba'th Party or what is known as "Party Generals" were instrumental not only in the actual process of power seizure, but also in the more arduous task of maintaining power. Instead of adopting democratic means, mass demonstrations or popular uprisings, the Ba'thists resorted to their military wing and entrusted it with the task of wresting power from General Qassim in February 1963, and again from General Aref in July 1968.

The Ba'thist success in hanging on to power since 1968 has mainly been due to its neutralisation and extermination of all parties opposed to their rule. All forms of political and physical liquidation inside and outside Iraq were used against their adversaries. The Ba'thist absolute monopoly of power illustrates the incapability of

the political regime to co-exist with the phenomenon of opposition however weak or ineffectual it may be. It further illustrates the fact that the strength and steadfastness of any regime in Iraq lies in its ability to neutralise and eradicate all opposition forces.

During the sixties and seventies, the Communist Party, the only political organisation capable of rivalling the Ba'thists in the struggle for power, failed to effect any change of government, but not because they lacked popular support. In fact, they had attracted many supporters and sympathisers even from among the rank and file of the armed forces. Their main problem, however, was the fact that they lacked the support of high ranking officers and, unlike the Ba'thists and Arab nationalists, had no "Party generals" the one essential vehicle, which could have transported them to power. The Communist impact on the Iraqi political scene receded dramatically with the demise, during the 1990's, of their main supporter, the USSR.

The invasion of Kuwait which coincided with the advent of what came to be known as the "new world order", had an immediate impact on international attitudes towards the Iraqi opposition. Before the Kuwait crisis, the Iraqi opposition had no overt links with the West which, for a number of reasons, was quite reluctant to lend real support to the political forces hostile to the regime of Saddam Hussein. The separatist aspirations of the Kurdish movement were and still are seen as a major threat to territorial integrity of a number of regional countries, particularly Turkey, long considered a U. S. ally. Furthermore, Kurdish ties with Syria and Iran antagonised the West. On the other hand, Shi'a fundamentalism was almost universally seen as an ideological enemy of the West, and the ultimate objective of establishing an Iranian style Islamic fundamentalist revolutionary regime in Iraq had no appeal to Western

political sensibilities. Iraqi leftists and Arab nationalists were not in a better position. There was deep and mutual mistrust between the West and these opposition groups, many of which were based, sponsored and backed by Damascus. The political ideologies and objectives adopted and preached by these groups, especially with regard to Israel, socialism and imperialism, run counter to the interests of the West.

The invasion of Kuwait marked a dramatic shift in the attitude of the West towards Iraqi opposition in that it suddenly provided a common denominator: opposing the policies of Saddam Hussein. The universal condemnation of the aggression provided the opposition forces with a golden opportunity to exploit Saddam Hussein's misadventure. The invasion also impacted on the intra-opposition relations. Serious attempts were, for the first time, made to patch up, at least temporarily, the differences between various groups seeking to topple the Ba'thist regime in Baghdad. Encouraged by what seemed at the time as the imminent fall of the Ba'thist regime, both Syria and Iran, pushed the opposition to hold a general conference with a view to forming a united front. But the deep ideological and strategic differences between the opposition groups made the task difficult to achieve.

The first attempt at creating an umbrella organisation resulted in the birth of the Joint Action Committee, which proved too fragile to withstand the turbulence of Iraqi politics. The newly created Committee failed to present a united front because, among other things, of the arrogance of the Islamic bloc, which looked down with disdain upon the other political groupings and whose leadership insisted it was capable, on its own, of leading the Iraqi masses to victory over Saddam Hussein. The JAC was further weakened by regional involvement in the affairs of Iraqi opposition. The hegemony of Syria and Iran over many of the opposition groups based in their

territories practically paralysed the opposition and removed its independence of action. In accepting to operate under the wings of Damascus or Tehran, many opposition groups subjected their activities to political considerations directly related to the interests of the host countries, which did not allow any of its protégé groupings to cross the limits set for them, effectively practicing active censorship and the right of veto on the activities of the protégé groups.

Despite the failure of the JAC's Beirut Conference to bridge the gaps between rival opposition groups, intensive attempts continued in this direction. The second part of 1992 witnessed two important initiatives, which resulted in the holding of two important opposition gatherings: the first in Vienna; the second on Iraqi soil in Salah Al-Din. The outcome of these gatherings, which were attended by a wide section of the Iraqi opposition, was the creation of a new organisational structure, the Iraqi National Congress (INC). But this newly created umbrella organisation, unlike the Iranian experience during 1979, which had produced a unified opposition leadership embodied in Khomeini who had co-ordinated domestic and exile opposition, did not have a unified command or an individual leader with enough popularity, charisma or gravitas to guide the opposition. Ahmad Chalabi, the Western-educated Shi'a millionaire was practically not known in the political arena before the Vienna Conference, which catapulted him to notoriety. Thus, two whole years of consultations, deliberations and meetings failed to produce an individual with enough legitimacy and authority to fill the leadership vacuum.

The Vienna and Salah Al-Din conferences, like the Beirut gathering, which was held in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's defeat and ejection from Kuwait, sought to find a common ground on which a minimum agreement between the rival opposition

parties could be reached. However, the experience of the two years after the Kuwait crisis witnessed unprecedented intense, inner rebellions, hostilities, dissensions, frictions and plots, which showed that each group had placed its own agenda and sectarian, nationalist or regional interests above the higher Iraqi national interests.

The Vienna and Salah Al-Din conferences also sought to gain international recognition for the opposition movement and to steer the movement away from the conflicting interests of regional powers, while at the same time seeking political and material support from regional countries such as Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The desire to project an image of independence was reflected in the choice of Vienna and Salah Al-Din as venues for the two conferences. The organisers of the two gatherings had hoped that geographical neutrality of the conference venue would reflect the free will and national independence of the Iraqi opposition movement.

Despite the rhetoric of the press releases and communiqués, the Vienna and Salah Al-Din conferences were held against a background of widespread disappointment and despondence that no single political party, or even the whole opposition, which claimed to have a large following inside Iraq, can topple or even shake the regime of Saddam Hussein. Although the international coalition had meted out extremely painful blows to the regime, the opposition did practically nothing to indicate that it could threaten the central government authority or influence the man in the street who had grown sceptical about the effectiveness of the opposition. No exile political organisation succeeded in exploiting the weaknesses of the regime during the Gulf War and in the period immediately after. This failure deprived all opposition parties of the opportunity to prove their legitimacy and credibility within the framework of the opposition itself and before the Iraqi people.

With the possible exception of the Tehran-based Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) which deployed its recruits to take part in the March 1991 Intifada, all other opposition groups adopted a wait-and-see attitude towards the sudden popular surge against the Baghdad regime. Instead of devising ways to help those who were willing to pay with their lives for their salvation from the regime of Saddam Hussein, the opportunistic and sel-serving opposition parties were busy scheming how best to exploit the Intifada and direct its outcome to further their own partisan cause. It is ironic that the Uprising, which should have unified all forces endeavouring to unseat Saddam Hussein, should itself divide them and sow even more seeds of suspicion and recrimination among them.

The total absence of any leadership or co-ordination among the rebelling provinces was perhaps the most damaging shortcoming. In a way, the Intifada embodied the same shortcomings and weaknesses, which have plagued the Iraqi opposition movement in general. Inexperienced young men who had no military training took charge of a great task which even professional soldiers would find difficult to achieve.

The Intifada came as a response to the oppressive policies of the Ba'thist regime. There were many reasons behind the its failure to produce the desired outcome. Among other things, the Iran-based Islamist Shi'a opposition, which attempted to monopolise the glory and fruits of the uprising even before any result was achieved, imbued the popular uprising with an unmistakable sectarian colour. This immediately estranged many Sunnis who would otherwise have extended a much-needed helping hand. The wild expectation that foreign succour was forthcoming mcted out a severe psychological blow to the Intifada whose activists were left on their own to fight

against a formidable vengeful force.

Prior to the establishment of the INC, Iraqi opposition groups, had very little, if any, relations beyond the region. Chalabi's outward-looking orientation, however, was soon to lead to the emergence of new currents and trends, which were hitherto unknown in Iraqi opposition work. From the beginning, it was clear that international support came mainly from the United States. Washington's support of Ahmad Chalabi was however quite opportunistic. In providing generous support, both on financial, political and media levels, the U. S. was following its own agenda. Among other things, it sought to contain the opposition movement, plan its future and use it as a tool to apply pressure on the regime of Saddam Hussein.

The INC also had its own drawbacks and weaknesses, some of which were quite serious. The very fact that the INC was seen to be operating in close association with the United States was quite detrimental in that it heightened its isolation. The U.S.'s initial exaggeration of the INC's power and overestimation of its capabilities had its negative impact on the INC, as well as on Washington itself. Furthermore, the fact that the INC was associated with the U.S.A, especially its collaboration with the CIA, undermined its standing on the national and regional Arab scene.

The secretive manoeuvring of Chalabi, his negative image as a dishonest businessman, his high-handedness and devious attempts at exploiting differences among rival as well as allied opposition groups and personalities, weakened the INC's standing in the eyes of most Iraqis to whom Chalabi failed to project a role model. Chalabi's manipulative policies not only estranged a number of political groupings but also made personal enemies of a host of Iraqi opposition leaders. But the most serious flaw, however, in the INC was its lack of a clear vision of Iraq's

future on the one hand, and the deep differences in strategies adopted by rival groups to effect political change in the country.

The Constitutional Monarchists who continually sing the praises of the royal regime are, in fact, out of tune with the times and are trying to re-impose a political system with which the present generation does not identify, as the royal regime was ended more than forty-two years ago. Sharef Ali Bin Hussein, who is seeking restoration of the throne does not possess the personal qualities necessary for attracting loyal followers in a country he has never set foot in, since he fled Baghdad, as an infant, in 1958, or among a people who had never heard of him before the launch of his movement in 1992. The image of Monarchist Iraq as a feudal, corrupt and uncritically pro-Western regime is too deeply etched in the national consciousness of the Iraqis to be eradicated by an untested, little known politician, whose claim to the throne rests solely on the fact that he is a maternal cousin of the last monarch.

The Communists and leftists, on the other hand, who were dreaming of a flourishing socialist system are still reminiscing about a past, which is impossible to resuscitate. The collapse of the USSR meant the loss of the Iraqi Communists' lifeline. With the disintegration of their party organisation and the resultant recriminations, resentments and internal division, their impact on Iraqi opposition has dwindled dramatically. Before the conference of Salah Al-Din the Communists were one of the five constituents of the Joint Action Committee and were treated as one of the major political currents. One result of the Communist decline can be seen in the fact that several of its leading members abandoned the socialist ideal and started advocating democracy and world peace. Many of the Union of Iraqi Democrats and the Iraqi

Human Rights Organisation are ex-Communists. The party now consists mainly of old die-hard cadres with an ever decreasing following.

As for the Shi'a Islamists who continue to dream of a revolutionary republic in Mesopotamia, the experience of the post Gulf War era showed that they have not been able to present a united front. Nor did they have a co-ordinated strategy as to how to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein. The *Da'wah* Party, for example, has adopted a four-stage strategy to achieve its objective of seizing power. But *Munadhama Al-Amal Al-Islami* (Islamic Action Organisation) seeks to achieve the same objective through armed struggle, which it believes should constitute the only stage of ridding Iraq of its present rulers. SCIRI, on the other hand, has based its strategy on the leader as symbol, guiding popular resistance to effect political change.

It is quite noticeable that, of all opposition formations, Arab Sunni opposition groups are almost non-existent. Apart from the wall of distrust, which stands in the way of Sunni cooperation with the Shi'a opposition, there are numerically, considerably fewer Sunni Arab Iraqis living abroad. Whatever may be said of the regime's repression of the Shi'a in Iraq, Saddam Hussein feels that the Sunnis could constitute a decidedly more real threat to his rule, as they occupy the highest and most sensitive posts in the military establishment, security and intelligence apparatus as well as the government machinery. Any hesitation to show total allegiance to the regime is more severely punished in the case of Sunnis than otherwise. From the Sunni regime's point of view, this constitutes not just an ordinary crime, but high treason. Fear of brutal retaliation, even against sixth-degree relatives, has therefore constrained them to be fully engaged in opposition activities.

All opposition umbrella organisations looking to foreign powers for support in the effort to topple Saddam Hussein have failed to deliver. The Iran-based Shi'a Islamists, for example, who were operating under the SCIRI banner failed to unite or coordinate their activities. Wide differences over strategic narratives transformed SCIRI into just another group operating alongside a multitude of other opposition parties. The Damascus-based JAC also failed to provide a united front. Differences over proportions and sectarian representation meted out a deadly blow to what had earlier been hoped to be a canopy encompassing all opposition groupings. Nor has the INC, which has unashamedly been working closely with the U.S. succeeded in bringing the divided Iraqi opposition together back to the fold. On the other hand, the Kurdish movement did not fare any better. The Kurds had pinned high hopes on the Arbil-based parliament, elected in 1992. These hopes were soon dashed when hostilities broke out between Barzani and Talbani over leadership of the Iraqi Kurds.

Like the very party which the opposition movement has been endeavouring to remove from government for so long, most opposition groupings are in effect intolerant and exclusive, on the sectarian, religious and ethnic levels with widely different narratives and visions of the future. Just as the ruling Ba'th Party was not planned to include Kurds or Turcomans, the Kurdish bloc is exclusively closed to non-Kurds. Shi'a opposition parties, despite assurances to the contrary, are not designed to embrace Sunnis or non-Muslims. Unless a broad national programme, open to all Iraqis, regardless of their religion, race or ethnicity is established, the opposition movement will never be able to leave the quagmire of exclusion or make any progress towards democratic change in Iraq.

Finally, in response to the central question posed at the beginning of the investigation as to the reasons for the opposition's failure to topple the regime in Baghdad and install a new government capable of taking the country out of its crisis, we might point out that there were three major reasons for the lacklustre. The first lies in the opposition's own weakness, fragmentation, inner conflicts and its inability to present a credible political programme. For the development of opposition movement in the post-Gulf era shows that the political groupings were in fact waging two wars on two different fronts: one against the regime of Saddam Hussein, the second against each other. Squabbles over the proportion of representation and insistence to obtain maximum influence was particularly harmful. Most of the political groupings, citing their past struggles and sacrifices, wanted to acquire a high proportion of representation even before they agreed to attend any conference.

The complexity of the Kurdish question in Iraq was another reason which further complicated the task of forging a united opposition front. While non-Kurdish parties struggled to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein and install a more humanitarian and democratic regime in Baghdad, the Kurds continue to see the struggle through narrow nationalistic eyes. Their aim is not to liberate Iraq from the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, but to achieve some sort of autonomy in the predominantly Kurdish areas of Iraq. In furthering their nationalistic cause, the Kurdish movement thinks nothing of negotiating with Saddam Hussein or concluding agreements with his regime, as it repeatedly did from April 1991 until 1996, when Barzani asked the Baghdad regime to back him up against his rival Talbani. Since JAC had no public relations philosophy and did not speak with one voice, it failed miserably in mobilising the Iraqis, both among ex-patriots and inside Iraq, to rally behind its banner and rise against the regime in Baghdad

The third reason for the opposition's failure was the success of Saddam Hussein's regime in re-grouping its striking forces and restoring sufficient power to prop up the Baghdad central government. The regime's characteristic ruthlessness manifested itself in the brutal crushing of the March 1991 Intifada and in the mobilization of its formidable Security and *Mukhabarat* (Intelligence) forces to punish, with extreme brutality, any clandestine opposition activities, however insignificant or ineffectual they might be. What further inspired terror in the hearts of the Iraqis was the infiltration by Saddam Hussein's agents of most of the opposition groups.

The high hopes placed by Arabs as well as other nations on the Iraqi opposition's ability to oust the Baghdad regime was quite a miscalculation, based on overestimation of the potentials and resources of the Iraqi opposition. Another miscalculation was that which underestimated the power and resilience of the regime of Saddam Hussein which was capable of surviving against great odds, amidst a sea of regional and international hostility.

The Iraqi opposition movement is both a victim and a culprit. As we have seen throughout the previous pages, the movement's evident failure and paralysis can be attributed to a variety of factors, some which lay far beyond the movement's control, while others are simply of the movements' own making. However, as pointed out in the introduction, there are basically three identifiable factors that played a major role which led to state of ineffectiveness that has plagued the Iraqi opposition movement from the early days of the Gulf crisis and throughout the post-Gulf War era.

The actual dilemma of the opposition movement may be likened to a triangle, with three clear dimensions. The first dimension symbolizes the nature of the Iraqi society; the second, the nature of the Iraqi state, while the third represent the nature of the opposition movement itself. The interplay between these three dimensions or factors constitutes the major reason behind the state of powerlessness in the opposition movement .

On the one hand, the nature of the Iraqi society had an unmistakable impact on the overall performance of the opposition movement, which failed escape from or rise above the inherit problems and division of the society. Indeed, the fragmentation crystallized within the opposition groups operating in exile. The ethnic and sectarian conflicts appeared just as deep and serious as actual rivalries and conflicts within the larger Iraqi society at home. Thus, the Iraqi opposition movement became a mirror's image of a disunited society.

The nature of the Iraqi state in general and the characteristics of Saddam Hussein's regime, in particular, constitute another major factor which had a great negative impact on the movement's achievement and political weight. The rigidly centralized structure of the state and the highly personalized power within the regime had effectively neutralized the ability of the movement to establish itself on Iraqi soil. The Baghdad regime proved quite able to deter the opposition from conducting major activities inside the country and prevent the people from cooperating with the opposition movement in exile. The regime, by effective employment of its formidable repressive power, was able to divorce the Iraqi opposition movement in exile from its natural constituency inside the country.

Finally, the third major factor which contributed to the evident failure of the movement was the permanent state of infighting, disunity, and conflict within the movement's different factions. This state of affairs was aggravated by the absence of a generally accepted agenda. On the other hand, the regional and international opportunistic intervention in the affairs of the opposition had a very negative impact on the movement as a whole. Instead of enhancing the mutually suspicious and enfeebled opposition movement, the conflicting interests and objectives of these external powers deepened its fragmentation and ineffectiveness.

Appendix I: Maps

Iraq

Racial, Religious and ethnic Map of Iraq

Spread of the March 1991 Intifada

No-Fly Zones

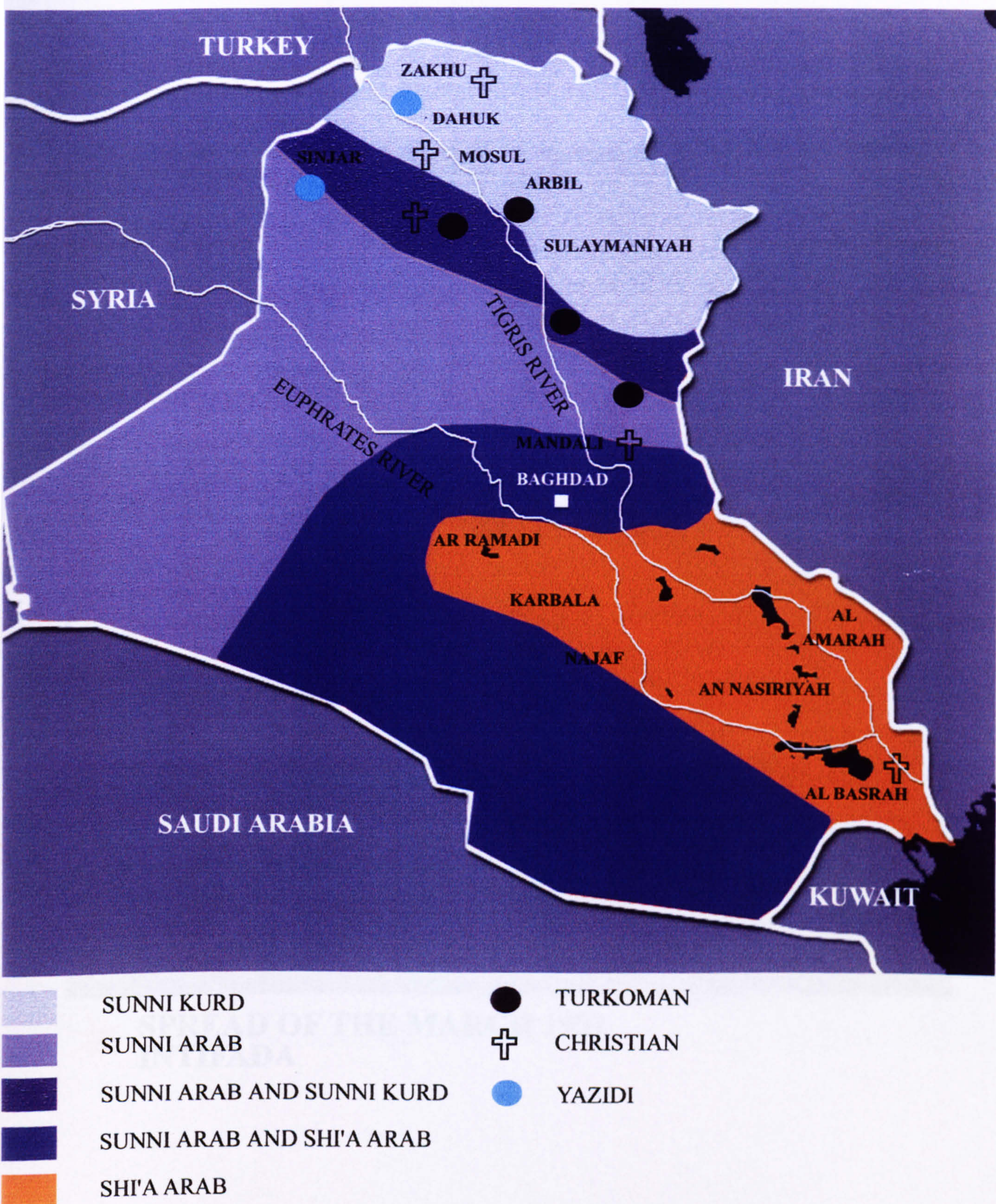
Kurdish-Kurdish Conflict

IRAQ



Source: Area Handbook Series, Federal Research Division
(Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1990) modified.

RACIAL, ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MAP OF IRAQ



Source: Area Handbook Series, Federal Research Division
(Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1990) modified.



SPREAD OF THE MARCH 1991 INTIFADA

Source: Area Handbook Series, Middle East Volume
(Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1991)

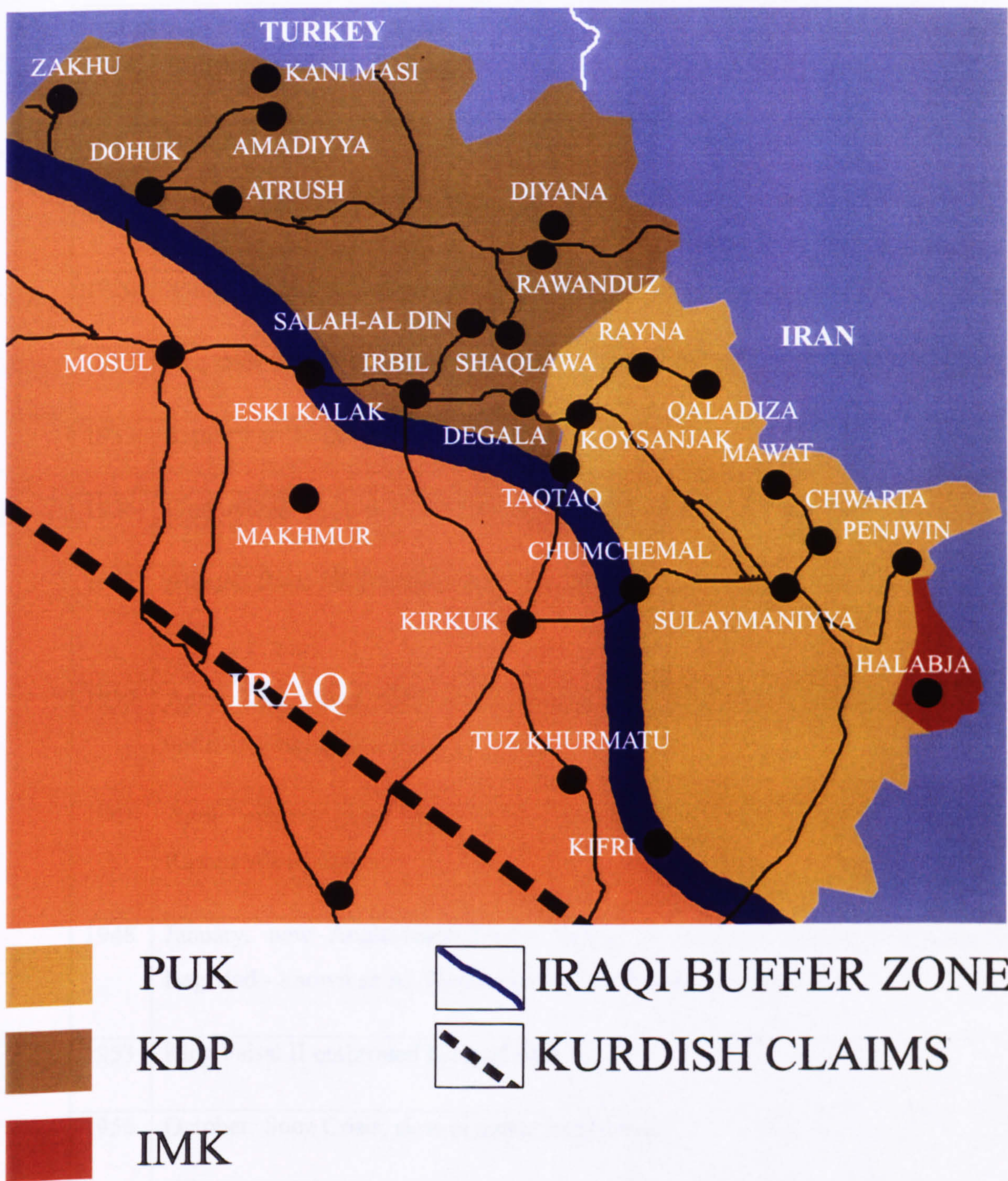
KURDISH-KURDISH CONFLICT



 NO-FLY ZONE

Source: Area Handbook Series, Federal Research Division
(Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1990) modified.

KURDISH-KURDISH CONFLICT



Source: Area Handbook Series, Federal Research Division
(Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1990) modified.

Appendix II: Modern Iraq: Chronology

1914	British occupation of Basra
1917	Baghdad falls
1920	Iraqis rebel against British rule
1920	Sharef Faisal Bin Hussein crowned King of Iraq
1932	Iraq ends British Mandate and joins League of Nations as an independent state
1933	September: King Faisal dies; King Ghazi succeeds
1936	First military coup in the middle East backed by General Bakr Sidqi
1937	August: Bakr Sidqi assassinated; Hikmat Suleiman's government overthrown by army
1939	April: King Ghazi killed in car accident; succeeded by infant son, Faisal II, under regency of Prince 'Abd Al-Ilah'
1941	April: military coup d'etat: 'Government of National Defence' formed by Rashid 'Ali Al-Kailani
1948	January: new Anglo-Iraqi Treaty signed at Portsmouth; mass protests in Baghdad - known as Al-Wathba (the leap); Treaty abandoned
1953	King Faisal II enthroned King of Iraq
1956	October: Suez Crisis; riots in major Iraqi towns
1958	Formation of United Arab Republic (Egypt and Syria); Jordan and Iraq form Arab Union
1958	July: military coup d'etat in Baghdad; monarchy ends with declaration of Republic

1963	February First Ba'thist coup d'etat; Qassim and colleagues killed
1963	November President 'Abd Al-Salam 'Aref and non-Ba'thist Arab nationalist officers eject Ba'thists from power
1967	June: war with Israel
1968	July: Second Ba'thist military military coup. Abd Al-Rahman 'Aref toppled; Ahmad Hasan Al-Bakr becomes president
1975	March: Algiers Agreement between Saddam Hussain and Shah of Iran partitions Shat Al-arab waterway and ends Iranian assistance to KDP; Kurdish revolt collapses
1978	Saddam deports Khomaii from Iraq
1979	Saddam Husain sworn in as president; bloody purge of military and Ba'th leadership
1980	Iraq-Iran War breaks out ostensibly over border disputes
1988	February: Saddam attacks Kurds with chemical weapons in Halabcha
1988	August: Iraq-Iran war ends
1990	August: Iraq invades and annexes Kuwait; UN imposes total trade embargo on Iraq
1991	January: 'Desert Storm' begins:
1991	February Iraqi forces ejected from Kuwait
1991	March armed rebels start the Intifada 14 of the 18 Iraqi provinces fall briefly into rebel hands
1991	End of March, Joint Action Committee (JAC) holds Beirut Conference
1992	May: elections in Kurdish zone: more or less equal balance between KDP and PUK

	PUK
1992	June Iraqi opposition Vienna Conference
1992	October, Opposition hold national conference on Iraqi soil, Salah Al-Din
1994	Head of Iraqi Military Intelligence (General Wafiq Al-Samarabee) defects to the West
1995	February: Iraq accepts UN Security Council Resolution 986 (Oil for Food)
1996	August: Iraqi government forces enter Arbil and help KDP retake the regional capital from PUK forces

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<i>Badr</i>	Harakat Al-Mujahideen	M. Al-Hakim (Tehran)
<i>Al-Wifaq</i>	National Democratic Accord	S. Al-Ali (London)
<i>Al-Iraq Al-Hurr</i>	Free Iraqi Council	Saad Salih Jabr (London)
<i>Baghdad</i>	National Accord Movement	Ayad Allawi (London)
<i>Al-Watan</i>	National Democratic Coordination Committee	(Damascus)
<i>Al-Dusturiya</i>	Iraqi Monarchist Movement	Sharef Ali Hussein (London)
<i>Dar Al-Salam</i>	Iraqi Islamic Party	Usama Al-Tikriti (London)
<i>Tariq Al-Shaab</i>	Iraqi Communist Party	Hameed Bayati (Kurdistan)
<i>Sawt Al-Iraq</i>	Islamic Da'wah Party	Abu Ahmad Jaffari (London)
<i>Risalat Al-Iraq</i>	Iraqi Communist Party	Majid Al-Yasiri (London)
<i>Nida Al-Rafidain</i>	SCIRI	Bayan Jabr (Damascus)
<i>Al-Dimocrati</i>	Iraqi Democratic Union	Farouq Ridgaa (London)

<i>Al-Mu'tamar</i>	Iraqi National Congress	Ahmad Chalabi (London)
<i>Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi</i>	Iraqi Studies Centre	Ghassan Attiya (London)
<i>Al-Manara</i>	Iraqi Islamic Party	Usama Al-Tikriti (London)
<i>Al-Taqreer Al-Iraqi</i>	Iraqi Research Institute	Jalil Attiya (London)
<i>Athawara Husseiniya</i>	Al-Balaghi Family	Hader Al-Balaghi (London)
<i>Ghad Dimocrati</i>	Iraqi Democratic Assembly	Salih Dugla (London)
<i>Al-Ishtiraki</i>	Iraqi Socialist Party	Mubdir Wayyis (Damascus)
<i>Al-Shams</i>	Ex-Ba'thist	Hasan Alawi (Damascus)
<i>Al-Shahada</i>	SCIRI	M. Al-Hakim (Tehran)
<i>Al-Bina</i>	Iraqi Mujahideen	M. Al-Hakim (Tehran)
<i>Al-Minbar</i>	Iraqi Islamic Institute	Hussein Sadr (London)
<i>Al-Nour</i>	Al-Khou'i Foundation	Majid Khou'i (London)

2. Interviews and Correspondence

Interview with Abdul Hussein Shaban, INC Secretary General 1992-1995, in London on 20th September 1999.

Interview with Abdul-Sattar Al-Duri, ex-Ba'thist leader, in London on 18th February 2000.

Interview with Ahmed Chalabi, INC Executive Committee President, in London on 11th September 1999.

Interview with Ayad Allawi, Leader of Al-Wifaq Al-Watani Al-Iraqi (Iraqi National Accord), in London on 2nd October, 1999.

Interview with Faris Al-Jadir, ex-military officer in the Iraqi Army, in London on 1st February 1999.

Interview with General Tawfeeq Al-Yassiri, ex-member of *Al- Wifaq Al-Watani* (National Accord) leadership, in London on October 12th 1999.

Interview with General Wafiq Al-Samarraei, Ex-Chief of Iraqi Military Intelligence, in London on 5th April 1999.

Interview with Ghassan Al-Attiya, editor-in-chief, *Al-Mallaf Al-Iraqi*, in London on 1st October 1999.

Interview with Hamid Al-Bayati, SCIRI London representative, in London on 15th March 1999.

Interview with Hazim Al-Sha'lan, ex-Ba'thist and tribal leader, in London on 15th September 1999.

Interview with Hoshiar Zibari, KDP London representative, in London on 15th January 2000.

Interview with Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, *Al-Da'wah* Party London representative, in London on 1st March 2000.

Interview with Ihsan Abdul Aziz, London representative of the Islamic Movement in Kurdistan, in London on 22nd February 2000.

Interview with Latif Rasheed, PUK London representative, in London on 17th January 2000.

Interview with Mahmud Al-Sheikh Radhi, London representative of the pro-Syrian Ba'thists, in London on 15th April 1999.

Interview with Majid Al-Yasiri, London representative of the Iraqi Communist Party, in London on 1st September 1999.

Interview with Muhammad Abdul Jabbar, leader of *Harakat Kawadir Hizb Al-Da'wah Al-Islamiya- Al-Iraq* (Al-Da'wah Party Cadres' Movement-Iraq), in London on 15th September 1999.

Interview with Muhammad Al-Alousi, leader of *Al-Kutla Al-Islamiya* (Islamic Bloc), in London on 20th August 1999.

Interview with Muhammad Hamawand, independent Kurdish intellectual, in London on 26th March 2000.

Interview with Muhammad Ihsan, ex- member of *Al- Wifaq Al-Watani* (National Accord), in London on 15th January 2000.

Interview with Muhammed Bahr Al-Uloun, Member of INC Presidential Council and Shi'a religious leader, in London on 5th September 1999.

Interview with Muwaffaq Al-Rubai', Ex-member of the Da'wah Party leadership, in London on 17th May 1999.

Interview with Nabil Al-Musawi, Member of the INC General Secretariat, in London on 15th February 2000.

Interview with Sa'ad Salih Jabr, leader of *Al-Majlis Al-Iraqi Al-Hurr* (Free Iraqi Council), in London on 1st March 1999.

Interview with Saffia Al-Suhail, daughter of assassinated tribal leader Sheikh Talib Al-Suhail, in London on 2nd September 2000.

Interview with Salah Al-Sheikhli, Member of *Al- Wifaq Al-Watani* (National Accord) leadership in London on 15th October 1999.

Interview with Salah Omar Al-Ali, Leader of *Tajammu' Al-Wifaq Al-Democrati Al-Iraqi* (Iraqi Democratic Accord Assembly) in London on February 9th 1998.

Interview with Walid Al-Tamimi, Ex-representative of Iraqi Democratic Union, in London on 10th March 1999.

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